

**T.C. DOGUS UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
MA IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**SAMUEL BECKETT: A POSTMODERN PLAYWRIGHT OF
SILENCE AND NEGATION**

MA THESIS

**Iřılay ALBAYRAK
200789003**

**Advisor:
Assist. Prof. Dr. Oya BERK**

Istanbul, June 2010

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ABSTRACT

In this study, Samuel Beckett's four plays, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Not I*, will be analyzed with a view to highlighting Beckett's major concerns as a postmodern playwright. These plays were chosen on the grounds that they comprise the main themes of Beckett's drama and illustrate how he subverts the norms and conventions of traditional drama in order to convey the plight of the modern man in a meaningless world that is devoid of stable values and that therefore resists any traditional interpretations. An in-depth analysis of *Company* and *Stirrings Still* will also be offered as these two particular prose works, written in the later period of Beckett's career, shed light on his previous plays and fictional writings by 'revisiting' them in numerous references and allusions.

ÖZET

Bu tezde, Samuel Beckett'in dört oyunu, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape* ve *Not I*, Beckett'in post modern bir oyun yazarı olarak temel konularını vurgulayan bir görüş ile ele alınacaktır. Adı geçen bu oyunlar Beckett tiyatrosunun ana temalarını kapsadıkları ve Beckett'in sağlam değerlerden yoksun anlamsız bir dünyada bulunan modern insanın durumunu yansıtmak amacıyla nasıl geleneksel tiyatronun kurallarını ve alışkanlıklarını altüst etmesini örnekledikleri için seçilmişlerdir. Ayrıca Beckett'in kariyerinin sonlarında yazılan iki önemli eser, *Company* ve *Stirrings Still*, Beckett'in daha önceki oyunlarına ve kurgusal yazılarına tekrar tekrar dönüp sayısız referanslar vererek ışık tuttuklarından dolayı bu yapıtların geniş kapsamlı bir analizi de sunulacaktır.

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INTRODUCTION

Samuel (Barclay) Beckett was one of the most celebrated and influential dramatists and novelists of the twentieth century. His works, even though they were written in the previous century, still have considerable impact on the contemporary literary world.

Beckett was born at Cooldrinagh in Foxrock, County Dublin, on Good Friday, 13 April 1906 (Knowlson 23). Upon receiving his B.A. in 1927, he went to France and lectured at the Ecole Normal Supérieure in Paris, where he became acquainted with James Joyce. Beckett worked with Joyce as an assistant and copier during the writing of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, and Joyce's modernist style began to shape Beckett's writing. As Knowlson states, they had much in common:

Joyce's exceptional linguistic abilities and the wide range of his reading in Italian, German, French, and English impressed the linguist and scholar in Beckett, whose earlier studies allowed him to share with Joyce his passionate love for Dante. They both adored words.... They shared, too, a fervent anticlericalism and skepticism in all matters to do with religion (105)

Beckett returned to Dublin in 1930 to teach French at Trinity College but submitted his resignation, after only four terms, saying that "he could not teach others what he did not know himself" (Knowlson 128). The following year he produced his first play, *Le Kid* (1931). Beckett was dissatisfied with life in Ireland and suffered from depression, so in 1932, he relocated to Paris, where he started writing one of his major works, *Dream of Fair to Middling Women*.

During World War II, Beckett joined the French Resistance upon the wish of his close friend, Alfred Péron. He worked within that organization until his cell was infiltrated and he was forced to leave Paris with his lifetime partner Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil, who had helped him when he was stabbed by a pimp in Paris and had to stay

in hospital in 1938. They eventually found refuge from the Gestapo in the small village of Roussillon and stayed there until 1945. After the war ended, Beckett was awarded the Croix de Guerre and the Médaille de la Résistance by the French government for his efforts in fighting the German occupation, and he settled again in Paris as a writer. Those war years had a considerable effect on his later writings. He started writing his well-known dramatic work, *Waiting for Godot* (1948), three years after the war ended and the effects of war can be traced down in the play's characters, setting and plot.

His mother, May Beckett, died on 25 August 1950 after long years of struggling with Parkinson's disease. This incident deeply affected Beckett. In addition, just four years after his mother's death, his brother Frank died of cancer. Beckett had always been a man distant from others and had pursued solitude, but after his mother's death, his need for estrangement from the people around him increased. In a letter to his friend Tom MacGrevy he once wrote, "I seem to recuperate something in the silence and solitude" (Knowlson 353).

In 1969, he was awarded the Nobel Prize. His biographer James Knowlson explains that he did not accept it for money, as he gave the money away, but he did not wish to be publicly discourteous (507). After that, he wrote several other plays and in 1989, five months after the death of his wife, he died in the month of December.

After his major prose work *The Trilogy*, Beckett's pivotal concern in his works became the obligation to go on writing no matter how difficult it was. As he wrote in *Three Dialogues with George Duthuit*,

there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express. (103)

However much he found it challenging to go on writing, he never stopped the creation process, similar to the way his protagonists felt the obligation to go on living in spite of the emptiness and absurdity that surrounded them. As Jennifer M. Jeffers puts it in her *Introduction to Samuel Beckett*,

From *Waiting for Godot*'s abundant cast of five with two acts to *Not I* of one mouth (not even a whole person) and one act of an unceasing flow of words, Beckett's texts breakdown or fall apart in midstream, only to rebound and find words "to go on". (5)

In this study, Beckett's four plays, *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Not I*, will be analyzed with a view to highlighting Beckett's major concerns as a postmodern playwright. These plays were chosen on the grounds that they comprise the main themes of Beckett's oeuvre such as the estrangement of the individual, the quest for the self, the absurdity of human existence, lack of communication in a meaningless world and the devastating effects of time on human beings. Moreover, these four plays also illustrate how Beckett subverts the norms and conventions of traditional drama in order to convey the chaos of existence which could not be subjected to any rational explanations. An in-depth analysis of *Company* and *Stirrings Still* will also be offered as these two particular prose works produced in the later period of Beckett's career shed light on Beckett's previous plays and fictional writings by 'revisiting' them in numerous references and allusions.

Beckett's works have been regarded as seminal texts of postmodern writing. His characters who inhabit a decentered and groundless void face a meaningless and absurd existence without the comforts of religion, myth, or any philosophical absolutes. Consequently, they slowly disintegrate in the nothingness at the center of existence. Through them, Beckett poses questions about commonly accepted values, dogmatic ideologies and the certainty of any standards of judgment. The notion of a fixed and stable identity, centralized, totalized and closed systems, and the role of Cartesian

reason in understanding the self and the outside world are also called into question in his works. More importantly, especially in his later works, Beckett questions his status as an artist who can produce an original work of art. Rather, he feels that he is an impotent writer who can only repeat the works of the past, incapable of anything original. As Watt, the protagonist of the novel with the same name puts it, his work seems

...to belong to some story heard long before, an instant in the life of another, ill told, ill heard, and more than half forgotten. (*Watt*, 46)

So, he in a way accepts the new name and place that Roland Barthes has assigned the author in *Death of the Author*; that is, the author does not have God-like power anymore and is called a scriptor who “is born simultaneously with the text” (147). As mentioned above, Beckett also approves of Barthes’ next claim that the scriptor’s “only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them” (149). Accordingly, Beckett’s works have intertextual characteristics. As Linda Ben-Zvi puts it in *Samuel Beckett*,

Beckett’s writings offer a unique artistic whole, a continuum with each piece bearing traces of those precede and each indicating the continuing battle Beckett has waged to create in the modern world. (Preface to *Samuel Beckett*)

As a postmodern playwright, Beckett went against the traditional notions of a unified, organized and linear structure of the drama. To begin with, all his plays start *in medias res*, and there are neither proper beginnings nor endings. Although two of his major works, *Waiting for Godot* (1952) and *Endgame* (1955), may at first glance be regarded as having a unified plot, consistent characters and a linear structure, Beckett does not allow his readers/audiences to fall for that. He feels the need to break the order of habit

in the traditional structure of drama in his works and he tries to go beyond all that has existed before, is existing now or will exist in the future. His aim in violating the conventions of traditional drama is to take his audiences/readers and himself as an artist away from the single-mindedness of looking at the traditionally accepted notions of certain issues such as religion, history and existence and to encourage his reader/audience to view them from different perspectives.

The only end that is reached in Beckett's plays is the realization that life consists of a repetitive pattern without any meaning. Since time devours everything, including man and itself, it is not possible to start over again. Beckett provides no answers and leaves the audience in ambiguity with the same questions and the same answers at the end of each work, showing that the reality of life is a big "nothing"; consequently, search for the meaning of life is pointless. For Beckett, this search was not only futile but at the same time quite absurd and funny. Thus, in depicting his characters he always added elements of the comic, such as the two tramps whose boots do not come off or whose pants fall down in *Waiting for Godot*. In almost all his works after the Second World War, Beckett dealt with the issues of fear, despair, insecurity and frustration which are the inescapable lot of humankind. In his plays Beckett dramatizes the human condition in its most absurd and meaningless form. His characters exist in a deep void devoid of any established values, unable to hold onto anything that can endow their lives with meaning and significance. Therefore, his plays, especially *Waiting for Godot*, are considered some of the best examples of The Theatre of the Absurd which is an attempt to shock its audiences by bringing them face to face with the harsh realities of the human situation and to make them accept their condition as it is, in all its mystery and absurdity. Furthermore, it shows that as there are no easy solutions to the mysteries of existence and because ultimately man is alone in a meaningless world the only thing left for him to do is to bear it with dignity, nobility and responsibility. This disillusionment and collapse of all previously held firm beliefs is a characteristic feature of the contemporary world. There are social and spiritual reasons for this sense of loss of meaning. The belief in the religious faith had started to decline with the Enlightenment and that led Nietzsche to speak of the 'death of God' and with the First

and Second World Wars. In the aftermath of these wars, there was a spiritual emptiness in Western Europe and the United States and consequently the world of the mid twentieth century lost its meaning and simply ceased to make sense. In such a chaotic world, previously held certainties, hope and optimism collapsed and man has faced with a universe that is both frightening and illogical - in a word, absurd. The logical reasoning became an illusion. Moreover, as there was no effective means of communication via a meaningful language, man became an outsider in the world he lived in. Taking these into consideration, the Theatre of the Absurd deals with a critique of established concepts and categories such as philosophy, science and religion which have become devoid of meaning.

From this perspective, the Theatre of the Absurd has much in common with the existential philosophy of Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus. However, as Martin Esslin points out in his well-known book, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, there is a difference between their existential claims and the tradition of the absurd. Esslin asserts that Sartre and Camus present their claims in styles that are rationalistic, discursive and consistent and thus they proclaim that “logical discourse can offer valid solutions, that the analysis of language will lead to the uncovering of basic concepts – Platonic ideas” (24-25). However, he asserts that,

This is an inner contradiction that the dramatists of the Absurd are trying, by instinct and intuition rather than by conscious effort, to overcome and resolve. The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing *about* the absurdity of the human condition; it merely *presents* it in being – that is, in terms of concrete stage images. ... It is this striving for integration between the subject matter and the form in which it is expressed that separates the Theatre of the Absurd from Existentialist theatre. (25)

As Lois Gordon puts it,

Beckett's heroes differ from those of Camus: they lack a sense of defiance regarding their lot in life. One would never imagine weary, disconsolate Sisyphus at the end of his rope, either literally or metaphorically; but this is Vladimir and Estragon's frequent situation. (*Reading Godot* 58)

Therefore, we cannot label Beckett's plays Existentialist in that they do not try to find logical reasons and solutions to the problems of the human condition and as Esslin says, they just present this predicament in its purest form.

Beckett's plays can also be related to the notion of the "static drama" which was created by Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949) a Belgian playwright, poet and essayist. Maeterlinck explained his views on static drama in his essay "The Tragical in Daily Life" (1896), which appeared in *The Treasure of the Humble* (1905). According to Maeterlinck man was powerless against the forces of fate and he claimed that human beings were accustomed to the tedium of life. The search for the unknown and the incomprehensible is the underlying element in his thought and in his plays he tries to lead his audience to the realization of the presence of that Unknown, of the Mystery which envelops us and lives in us and to show that there is an indefinable and uncanny destiny in every day life, which Beckett himself tries to represent in his plays too.

Maeterlinck considered the traditional tragic plays to be too exaggerated to reflect the true feelings of the individuals. His opening sentence in "The Tragic in Daily Life" explains his plea very plainly:

There is a tragic element in the life of every day that is far more real, far more penetrating, far more akin to the true self that is in us, than the tragedy that lies in great adventure. (97)

Accordingly, Maeterlinck went on with this claim and asserted the following idea:

It is no longer a violent, exceptional moment of life that passes before our eyes, it is life itself. Thousands and thousands of laws there are, mightier and more venerable than those of passion; but, in common with all that is endowed with resistless force, these laws are silent, and discreet, and slow-moving ; and hence it is only in the twilight that they can be seen and heard, in the meditation that comes to us at the tranquil moments of life. (108)

Therefore, Maeterlinck thought that contemporary art should not be an expression of human emotions but rather it should represent the external forces that compel people. The characters on stage should move and speak as though they are being pushed and pulled by an external force and no stress of emotion should be reflected on their faces. Thus Maeterlinck believed that with its vivid action, modern tragedy discards the dramatization of different aspects of life:

Othello is admirably jealous. But is it not perhaps an ancient error to imagine that it is at the moments when this passion, or others of equal violence, possesses us, that we live our truest lives? I have grown to believe that an old man, seated in his armchair, waiting patiently, with his lamp beside him; giving unconscious ear to all the eternal laws that reign about his house, interpreting, without comprehending, the silence of doors and windows and the quivering voice of the light, submitting with bent head to the presence of his soul and his destiny [...] I have grown to believe that he, motionless as he is, does yet live in reality a deeper, more human, and more universal life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the captain who conquers in battle, or "the husband who avenges his honor. (105)

In Beckett's plays too the most important action comes with the words and not with the movements of the characters. As Maeterlinck asserts, "it is not in the actions but in the words that are found the beauty and greatness of tragedies that are truly beautiful and great," (109). Founded on this idea, Beckett's plays are close in meaning and technique

to the static drama as they represent the human condition and the tediousness of life via characters who are completely impotent against the unknown that surrounds them.

In *Waiting for Godot* (1952) and *Endgame* (1955), Beckett expresses his major themes such as the monotony and weariness of human existence, the lack of communication in a disordered and destabilized universe and thus the alienation of the individual as well as the destructive effects of time. In so doing he uses language as a means of representing the absurdity of the human condition instead of action. For instance, he portrays the impossibility of communication through his creation of a disordered language employed by fragmented characters or selves. As there is no fixed value for anything, there is no possibility for a stable, steady and healthy communication. Furthermore, Beckett parodies and mocks the belief in Christian salvation that suffering can be redeemed through camaraderie as the pseudo-couples in the plays cannot be helpful to each other except keeping each other busy. Consequently, the characters have the tendency to escape to solitude as a means and an end to be a 'nobody'. Silences in Beckett's works are used as a way of coping with the uncertain inner self and the discrepancy between disorder and order lying outside that self. Moreover, in his works Beckett also points out that action is meaningless in a groundless world, thus action turns out to be a non-action in his plays and nothing actually seems to happen. As Estragon says in *Waiting for Godot*¹,

Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful! (41)

As a postmodern writer, Beckett accepts that reality is only a linguistic construct. He is especially against the idea that everything has a meaning and that the literary work of art should be the vessel that carries that meaning. On the contrary, Beckett emphasizes that "Nothing is more real than nothing" (*Malone Dies* 16) and as there is no reality, the

¹ All references to *Waiting for Godot* are to the following edition: *Waiting for Godot*. London, Faber and Faber: 1965.

work of art cannot represent anything. The outcome of this is the conviction that there is “Nothing to be done” (*Godot* 9) except doing nothing. As the two plays end, the characters remain as tortured victims of an empty meaningless existence, unable to do anything to change their situation.

In *Krapp’s Last Tape* (1958) and *Not I* (1973), Beckett presents the human isolation resulting from the individual’s vain attempt to become one with the inner and outer self. These plays also reflect the struggle of the artist in the act of creating a life-story and the enactment of writing is depicted with the help of the recurrent theme of memory, on which Beckett himself expounded on in *Proust*. The aged man in *Krapp* and the Mouth telling a ceaseless story in *Not I* are like authors telling and listening to their life-stories. Yet, they cannot reach a definite meaningful end that could explain their being, so they fail and start over again, which is reminiscent of Beckett’s struggle to write. Neither of these narrators have the ability to control their own stories: Krapp cannot change what he recorded thirty years ago and sometimes he does not even understand why he used a specific word (such as “viduity” when he tells about his mother’s illness) and the Mouth cannot even stop herself from telling her life story, let alone shaping and ordering it. Consequently, they cannot associate the stories they tell with their present selves. For sixty-nine-year-old Krapp, the thirty-nine-year-old Krapp is “that stupid bastard” and it is “hard to believe” that he was “even as bad as that” (10)². For the Mouth, the situation is even more troublesome since she refuses to “relinquish third person” (83)³ and while she is telling the story, she stops and asks questions, “what?” and “who?” as if she is talking to somebody in her mind or to herself and she provides her own answers to the questions – e.g., “no!” and “she!”. Therefore, neither Krapp nor the Mouth can create their selves in writing. Consequently, Beckett’s status as a writer is questioned and redefined in these plays. He is not an omnipotent writer who can produce coherent and unified works but one who fails each time he tries. His only achievement can be to “fail better”:

² All references to *Krapp’s Last Tape* are to the following edition: *Krapp’s Last Tape* and other Shorter Plays. London: Faber and Faber, 2009.

³ All references to *Not I* are to the following edition: *Krapp’s Last Tape* and other Shorter Plays. London: Faber and Faber, 2009.

Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.
(*Worstward Ho*, 89)

Company (1980) and *Stirrings Still* (1989) can be described as self-reflexive texts which depict the writer in the process of writing. Both texts reflect the trauma imported by the experience of writing and a philosophy of writing as punishment. In these works it is very easy to make a connection between the protagonists and Beckett himself as a writer. In *Stirrings Still*, this struggle is metaphorically reflected with the man sitting on the table and seeing himself rise and go. As S.E. Gontarski asserts in his introduction to *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose*,

The reader's focus is not only on a figure in a closed space, but on another figure and a narrator imagining them. We have, then, not just the psychologically complex but narratologically transparent image of a self imagining itself, but a self imagining itself imagining itself, often suspecting that it is being imagined itself. (XXIX)

The following quotation from *Company*⁴ also depicts the painful and agonizing process of composition:

Though now even less than ever given to, wonder he cannot but sometimes wonder if it is indeed to and of him the voice is speaking. May not there be another with him in the dark to and of whom the voice is speaking? Is he not perhaps overhearing a communication not intended for him? If he is alone on his back in the dark why does the voice not say so? Why does it never say for example, You saw the light on such and such a day and now you are alone on your back in the dark? Why? Perhaps for no other reason than to kindle in his mind this faint uncertainty and embarrassment. (9-10)

⁴ All references to *Company* are to the following edition: *Company*. London: John Calder Publisher, 2003.

As *Stirrings Still* revisits and comments on all of Beckett's previous works, it will be dealt with in a separate chapter in this study, whereas *Company* will be analyzed and referred to within the chapters on plays where relevant. Although Beckett's works bear witness to the traumatic experience of the agonized and disillusioned postwar writer, he did not stop producing works that were, far from being period pieces, timeless works of art. However, adhering to his motto, "The artistic tendency is not expansive, but a contraction" (*Proust* 63), he used less and less language until he reached the point of silence.

WAITING FOR GODOT

Waiting for Godot is a play in two acts. It traces two days in the lives of two men, Estragon and Vladimir, who try to kill time while they wait expectantly and unsuccessfully for someone named Godot to arrive. They eat, sleep, talk, argue, sing, play games, exercise, swap hats, and ponder on committing suicide — anything to keep the invading silence away, and to occupy themselves, even though there is nothing to be done.

Although it sounds very simple, the play has a lot more to it than that. It has a philosophical depth that has impressed critics and writers of all times and it has been a success on the stage as well. The actions, gestures, and words of the characters are usually taken to represent the human condition. *Godot* has been interpreted in many ways, from a parable of Christian salvation to a depiction of the meaninglessness of life, but such interpretations are often considered to limit the full implications of the play.

As with other dramatists such as Jean Genet, Eugène Ionesco, and others who have been categorized as dramatists of the Theater of the Absurd, Samuel Beckett has had a major influence on contemporary drama. Furthermore, he has been considered one of the founders of postmodernism. According to Linda Hutcheon, one of the prominent critiques of postmodern theory, the foundation of postmodernism includes moving “from the desire and expectation of sure and single meaning to a recognition of the value of differences and contradictions,” (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 21). This is exactly what Beckett presents within almost all of his major plays, especially in *Godot*.

In his well-known book, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin analyzes the absurd tradition and refers to *Waiting for Godot* as one of the most important works of this genre. Esslin underlines why *Godot* attracted a group of convicts more than the avant-garde of the time when it was first staged:

Because it confronted them with a situation in some ways analogous to their own? Perhaps. Or perhaps because they were unsophisticated enough to come to the theatre without any preconceived notions and ready-made expectations, so that they avoided the mistake that trapped so many established critics who condemned the play for its lack of plot, development, characterization, suspense or plain common sense. (21)

The authors of the absurd tradition attempt to release the theatre from those “preconceived notions and ready-made expectations” and Samuel Beckett achieved it with *Godot* successfully by presenting the predicament of the human existence in a meaningless and groundless world in its purest and basic form. *Godot*’s absurdity comes especially from the fact that Beckett does not provide us with any definite answers to the problem of the human condition, which is a quality that separates this play from the traditional theatre. Beckett only depicts what happens in our daily lives. As David Hesla asserts in *The Shape of Chaos*, “Man waits for his existence to be grounded on something other than what he himself is and does, but there is nothing else than man here, man now,” (138).

Waiting for Godot contains Beckett’s major representative postmodern themes, such as the estrangement/defamiliarization/fragmentation of the individual, the quest for self, the absurdity of existence, the lack of communication in a meaningless world, and the devastating effects of time. It focuses on the problematic postmodern themes of autonomy, certainty, authority, unity, universalization, continuity, and closure only to contradict them. Beckett’s aim is to show us how and to what purposes the characters reveal or depict these controversies in order to go beyond all the conventionalities that have existed before, are present now and will exist in the future. His aim is to deprive his characters and his reader of the stability and the certainty of established values that are commonly assumed to exist in the world. In so doing, Beckett tries to move his reader/audience away from the single-mindedness of looking at the traditionally and conventionally accepted notions of certain issues such as religion, history, and existence, and see them from different perspectives. Moreover, it is not only his reader/audience that he is trying to fuse into his texts, but he himself as the creator of

those texts becomes merged into his own work in the process. Beckett problematizes narrative representation in his works and thus his work becomes self-reflexive and, self-conscious – i.e., he is “ever aware of its status as discourse, as a human construct” (Hutcheon 53).

Lawrence Graver analyzes *Waiting for Godot* thoroughly in his book that shares the same name as the play, and he asserts that the play is “shaped to subvert generalization and to avoid definition,” (22). Graver, who completely agrees with Hugh Kenner’s comment on Beckett’s plays, states that “a Beckett play contains ideas but that no idea contains the play” (22). *Waiting for Godot* has been decried as existentialist since it deals with the questioning of the meaning of human existence. However, Beckett himself has denied any definite explanation to all of his works.

According to Graver, Beckett insists that

Waiting for Godot is designed to give artistic expression to ‘the irrational state of unknowingness wherein we exist, this mental weightlessness which is beyond reason’. Following this lead, it would be advantageous to begin talking about the play not as a structure of ideas, but as the dramatization of what it is like and what it means to exist in a state of radical unknowingness. (22)

Therefore, Beckett uses the individual’s existential predicament and dramatizes the forlorn and estranged individual’s struggle in a disordered universe, which is not only the real world but also the world of his text. There may not be wars on his stage, yet the characters suffer. They look as though they have lost their integrity. They are like creatures thrown onto the earth by their creator and left alone. However miserable their situation may be, they still try to find ways to keep their sanity in this void. Hence, they cling to one another as much as possible and repeat the most insignificant actions and at the same time try to communicate their boredom and hopelessness. The subject of their boredom and hopelessness is too heavy to bear. However, Beckett’s presenting his

characters on a stage that resembles the void surrounding the individual seems to mock the seriousness of their predicament. They are like clowns in a circus, with their big boots that do not come off easily, their falling down on the stage with their pants falling down as well, and with their misunderstandings such as mistaking Pozzo for Godot. Even the language, which is one of the most compelling elements, loses its feature as the transmitter of meaning and the essential tool for communication. In this way, characters' suffering on stage seems to create laughter rather than sorrow, and the language they use has meaning neither for readers/audiences nor for the characters themselves.

In this disorderly world, Beckett's use of style and language is designed to "accommodate the mess": no plot, no beginning-middle-end, no identifiable characters, no recognizable places, and no syntactically and grammatically continuous and meaningful sentence structures can be found in his works. He uses all of these so that his characters, reader/audience and he himself as an artist can go beyond the familiar and thus achieve an alienation from their present-bound status. While he attempts to reach this, he grapples with ideas already known by his reader/audience, such as the attainment of salvation and the cessation of suffering through redemption, the compassion for one another, the constant flux of time and life and the relation between fate and chance. All of these ideas are used to give the reader/audience a sense of familiarity but only to discard it later in order to show that nothing has definite meaning in this meaningless world.

In *From Shakespeare to Existentialism*, which expounds on Kierkegaard's existential views, Walter Kaufmann states that "Almost all men try to escape from themselves. And our duties, science, philosophy, social activities, churches, too help us to run away from ourselves," (205). Accordingly, in most of his works, Samuel Beckett depicts characters who are alienated from any kind of institutions whatsoever and are left alone with themselves with no way of escaping from their being. This state of alienation opens the road for their quest for the self. On this road, his characters recognize and become aware of the void that surrounds them. Eventually, they try to find ways to deal

with the suffering that stems from their existence in this void as an individual, which is an end result of the discrepancy between past and present, then and now, knowing and not knowing, going on and waiting, life and death, light and dark, imagination and reason, and all the other dualisms that are “existential and psychic predicaments for the human mind” (Brater 125). Thus, it is the duty of Beckett as the creator of his characters to help them be aware of the inexplicability of their situation although he believes that for the writer, “there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express” (*Duthuit* 103). Therefore, it is not only the characters’ struggle to overcome the unbearable agony of their lonely existence in this void but also Beckett’s struggle to search for his identity as an artist and a man. However, the artist’s search for a unified form of a work or of a self is impossible since the self is fragmented and disintegrated. There is no central core of anything anymore. In her essay, “Structure in Beckett’s Theatre”, Edith Kern explains this situation as follows:

Man alone in the universe. Man sundered into consciousness and a *me*. Man, like a child alone in the dark, inventing companions that will listen to him and reassert his existence by their presence. An archetypal *couple* that is but the mirror reflection of a *one*: both togetherness and aloneness. Timeless couples, perhaps two aspects of the same individual, in motion and rest. Those seem to be the structures underlying Beckett’s drama, moving us to sadness and laughter as they are concretized on the stage with ever-new comic inventiveness and poetry of language. (27)

Therefore, the artist is as ignorant and impotent as his characters are. Since there is no fixed order or reality, under these circumstances the artist cannot know what to produce or how to produce it. Yet the artist still insists upon creating and recreating even though his route is directed toward failure. His is a quest for showing the struggle between the inner and outer self and finding a style that can accommodate the state of chaos and is “an attempt to explore and to capture the essential nature of being” (Brater 114). As Lois Gordon explains,

Life is not what the traditional dramatists portrayed, a series of ordered events with beginning, middles, and ends. Neither are language and logic effective means for communication and discernment of meaning. Nevertheless, the human creature, even if no longer motivated by the conviction of a divine mission, is continuously compelled towards purposeful activity. The need for a moral or spiritual anchor remains. (*Reading Godot* 56)

Therefore, away goes the orderly plot or structure of language in order to portray the disorder and chaos in life. The stories of the characters start in the middle and go on a route that is similar to the route of memory. Even one of the most seemingly structured plays, *Waiting for Godot*, does not have the characteristics of coherent plays with an orderly plot and consistent characters familiar to the reader. As Lawrence Graver observes,

So thoroughgoing is the erosion of certainty that one feels as if he or she has entered a dreamlike environment, and like all dreams this one is governed more by deep feeling than logic. The emotions expressed, though, are far in excess of any evidence available to account for them, and at the start all we can do is wonder. (*Waiting for Godot* 23)

At the beginning of *Waiting for Godot*, the main characters Estragon and Vladimir have been waiting for someone to come or something to happen. We have no clue as to where they are, who they are, what or who they are waiting for, or what has happened before. In other words, Beckett does not supply his reader/audience with any prior knowledge as to his characters' circumstances. It is completely up to the reader/audience to interpret what Beckett has presented. As Katherine Worth asserts in *Samuel Beckett's Theatre: Life Journeys*, Beckett tries to throw in our faces "the urgent questioning, the not knowing, the contradictory possibilities; states of mind well known to people today brooding on the meaning of life, perhaps at times of crisis" (50). In

Godot, with Estragon and Vladimir, we find ourselves alone in the void waiting for someone or something to come and assign every action, every word a meaning. As Lois Gordon explains in *Reading Godot*,

Beckett's characters struggle to survive in a world devoid of moral certainty and validated cultural norms, and then they experience the troubling consequences that such an engagement elicits: the blurred distinctions between words and meaning, good and evil, madness and sanity – in other words, the mess, as Beckett described it. (17)

This state of insanity on the part of the character is not only seen in Beckett's plays but can also be observed in one of his short prose works, *Company*. This novella is a very good example of the character's struggle to cope with his fragmented self and the desperate situation that he is in. From this point of view, even though the genres of the works are different, the themes and the style that Beckett uses are similar.

Company is a novella in which an old man lying on his back alone in the dark is spoken to by a ghostly, stern voice he can neither confirm nor name. The voice sometimes speaks in the third person and describes the lying old figure's tormented restraint in the present; and sometimes it uses second person and narrates striking scenes from the old man's boyhood and adolescence. There is also recognized a first person voice that remains significantly absent – the pronoun which the old man desperately wishes to use, but cannot.

In this novella, there is a "voice" and a "one". However much the narrator tries to separate them from each other, it is as if they are different modes of the same self. The voice says, "You are on your back in the dark" and the "one" thinks, "He must acknowledge the truth of what is said" (7). As the narrator states, "Use of the second person marks the voice." The pronouns increase but the narrator does not like it and calls the third person pronoun "that cankerous other". And there is his hesitation: "Can he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot. He

shall not. You cannot. You shall not” (9). There is “he”, “you”, “one”, “the other”, but interestingly not an “I”, which clearly reveals that the narrator is completely alienated from the idea of his own self.

According to Eric P. Levy’s “*Company: The Mirror of Beckettian Mimesis*”,

The memories confirm an interior isolation so fundamental that no new experience can ever alter it and so inaccessible that even the individual is estranged from it and hence cannot truly know himself. Human experience is denied the resurrection of the sense of identity that the linear notion of life once took for granted. There can be no more life in Beckett’s literature because there is no longer an accessible subject to live it. (104)

Levy claims that in Beckett’s world of literature, the estrangement of the individual is the central motif. Beckett himself is the “devised deviser devising it all for company” (64). By adding and defamiliarizing autobiographical elements and allusions in his novella, Beckett displays his own artistic undoing in his work. If the man lying on his back is Beckett, the writer himself, it follows that he is not only writing about his character’s struggle against the fragmented selves in the world of text, but he is also writing about himself as an impotent writer unable to tell his story. Even though he tries to define his self, it is impossible to do so as it would be meaningless to name a subject without any meaning. He, like his characters, is just an object of the disorderly world of text, not the creator of the text. Linda Hutcheon claims that in postmodern theory “the concept of the artist as unique and originating source of final and authoritative meaning may well be dead, Barthes claimed” (*A Poetics of Postmodernity* 77). However, she does not mean that we should “limit our investigations to just readers and texts; the process of production too cannot be ignored,” (Hutcheon 80). This shows that the idea of the producer/creator of the texts “is being rethought” and it becomes “one *inferred* by the reader from her/his positioning as enunciating entity” (Hutcheon 81). Hence, the concept of the author is changed from creator or producer to the one inferred by the reader/audience. To put it another way, the author in a way becomes a character in his

work to be inferred from the text. Roland Barthes explains in “Death of the Author” that

The modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now. (148-49)

In other words, the author does not exist prior to the text but is created in the process of composition: i.e., he is no longer the ‘subject’ that creates his text but is reduced to a character who is moulded and shaped in the composition process.

As a postmodernist writer, Beckett also attempts to diminish the distinguished and privileged position that the writers have had as being the omniscient and omnipotent creators of their texts. To achieve that, in *Company* and almost all his other works, Beckett presents his own struggle as a writer and as an individual. The estrangement is made explicit when the privileged-all-knowing creator of the text imagines remembering his past fully and using the first person pronoun “I”:

If he were to utter after all? However feebly. What an addition to company that would be! You are on your back in the dark and one day you will utter again. One day! In the end. In the end you will utter again. Yes I remember. That was I. That was I then. (27)

However, these are all “unfathomable gropings of the mind” and when he uses “I” he orders himself: “Quick leave him” (32). According to Shira Wolosky, Beckett’s negativity “includes a linguistic nihilism, a negation of language that seems to extend not only to the world which language describes, but to repudiate language itself” (“The Negative Way Negated: Samuel Beckett’s *Texts for Nothing*” 213). Thus, self-

cancellation takes place “on the level of character [...] as the effort to resist, even while inevitably producing, fictional representations of the self” (221). In the same work, Wolosky states that “Beckett’s texts just as his ‘selves’ attempt to extricate themselves from time – from multiplicity, from externality – so exactly that they try to extricate themselves from language” (223). For this reason, Beckett tries to extricate his own language from the traditional and classical modes of writing in the same way he tries to extricate his own theatrical structure from the traditional and classical modes of drama.

The most notable way of achieving his artifice is the undoing of words, sentences and even stories in his works. In *Company* he asks the question, “why crawl at all?” meaning, why go on when you have fallen down or why go on when you have nothing to tell. Yet, he cannot stop doing so:

Give up all. Have done with all. With bootless crawl and figments comfortless. But if on occasion so disheartened it is seldom for long. For little by little as he lies the craving for company revives. The need to hear that voice again. If only saying again, You are on your back lying in the dark. (77)

This explains how he fails and does not succumb to failure for unknown reasons. Brian McHale focuses on this issue in *Postmodernist Fiction*, where he asserts that in postmodern texts the artist is “no longer content with invisibly exercising his freedom to create worlds”; hence, he

now makes his freedom visible by thrusting himself into the foreground of his work. He represents himself in the act of making his fictional world – or unmaking it, which is also his prerogative. (30)

In *Waiting for Godot*, this unmaking of the pre-ordered state is revealed when the characters become aware of the absurdity of their present condition: they are waiting

for Godot, yet they do not even know who he is and why they are waiting for him. Vladimir is more aware of this absurdity than Estragon:

VLADIMIR: All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which – how shall I say – which may at first sight seem reasonable, until they become a habit. You may say it is to prevent our reason from foundering. No doubt. But has it not long been straying in the night without end of the abyssal depths? That's what I sometimes wonder. You follow my reasoning?

ESTRAGON: (*aphoristic for once*). We are all born mad. Some remain so. (80)

To Estragon, these proceedings and Vladimir's rationalization is just insanity. Yet for Vladimir, in this illuminating moment, their situation has been revealed clearly.

VLADIMIR: We wait. We are bored. (*He throws up his hand.*) No, don't protest, we are bored to death, there's no denying it. Good. A diversion comes along and what do we do? We let it go to waste. Come, let's get to work! (*He advances towards the heap, stops in his stride.*) In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness! *He broods.* (81)

Even though Vladimir is aware of the fact that “all will vanish” so they have to do something about it, in the end they do nothing; thus, his revelation about being aware of their own circumstances is undone. According to Martin Esslin, *Godot* is among “works that are essentially concerned with conveying their author's sense of mystery, bewilderment, and anxiety when confronted with the human condition, and his despair at being unable to find a meaning in existence” (*The Theatre of the Absurd* 45). In addition to this, by showing his characters' impotence in changing their situation, Beckett himself reveals his own impotency in creating works that could help himself find a solution to the conundrum of being a writer and an individual at the same time.

The couples in *Godot* are like the fragmented couple in *Company*. Those couples have often been evaluated as different sides of the same person. This might be right to the extent that while they communicate, their sentences complement each other and it is felt as if there is only one person speaking:

VLADIMIR: You're right, we're inexhaustible.
 ESTRAGON: It's so we won't think.
 VLADIMIR: We have that excuse.
 ESTRAGON: It's so we won't hear.
 VLADIMIR: We have our reasons.
 ESTRAGON: All the dead voices.
 VLADIMIR: They make a noise like wings.
 ESTRAGON: Like leaves.
 VLADIMIR: Like sand.
 ESTRAGON: Like leaves. *Silence*.
 ...
 VLADIMIR: Say something!
 ESTRAGON: I'm trying. *Long silence*.
 VLADIMIR: (*in anguish*). Say anything at all!
 ESTRAGON: What do we do now?
 VLADIMIR: Wait for Godot.
 ESTRAGON: Ah! *Silence*. (40)

The language used here is very economical yet very poetic, which makes it sound as if it is a poem and someone is reading it aloud. However, it can also be seen as two characters complementing each other with their sentences merged, and hence, their characters become indistinguishable. As Graver explains,

The two friends themselves are slyly complicitous, much like intimates sharing special knowledge and secrets. Attuned so well to each other's deepest thoughts, deftly providing lines to quicken a lyrical movement, they are likely to make us feel almost as if we are intruding on their privacy. (*Waiting for Godot* 56)

Waiting for Godot starts as though the characters have always been on that stage even before the play started.

Estragon, sitting on a low mound, is trying to take off his boots. He pulls at one with both hands, panting. He gives up, exhausted, rests, tries again. *As before.* (9; emphasis added)

As was Estragon's first words are, "Nothing to be done." At first we might think that he is referring to the simple act of taking off his boots (he is having great difficulty in taking them off). Yet, nothing is that simple in the play though it seems to be so. In reality there is a far bigger issue than the boots' not coming off. The biggest and most compelling problem is their waiting for Godot – the symbolic meaning of which will be expounded on later.

Estragon's first words, "Nothing to be done", become meaningful only when Vladimir comes on the stage. Vladimir advances with wide apart legs as if he is alone on stage and he talks to himself. He explains that as he has persuaded himself that he has not tried everything, he has not stopped struggling. It is as if he is explaining why Estragon should not give up trying. Edith Kern is right in saying that they "are human beings essentialized to a point where they are almost interchangeable" ("Structure in Beckett's Theatre" 21), one completing the other by assigning meaning to the other's actions.

According to Kern's interpretation, Beckett purposefully turns the monologues of the characters into dialogues through which he presents the basic need of every human to have a companion in this long and tiresome journey of life. Yet, nothing can prevent this journey from being monotonous and predestined. It is eventually going to be over and there is nothing to be done.

Why is there nothing to be done then? As Stephani Pofahl Smith suggests in "Between Pozzo and Godot: Existence as Dilemma",

Man is always faced with mutually exclusive possibilities. Heads, there is some form of transcendence and all our questions will be answered. Tails, we exist only in time and we will never know. We have neither the certainty needed to hope and expect, nor the certainty to give up hope. (890)

Thus, none of the characters can find a valid solution to their present condition as they do not know what is exactly happening. In *Godot*, Estragon and Vladimir wait for Godot without having an absolute knowledge of who he is or if he will come or not. In addition to that, they constantly forget about the meeting place and time. Given the uncertainty that pervades the play, they can be neither hopeful about Godot's coming nor desperate because he will not come:

ESTRAGON: You're sure it was this evening?

VLADIMIR: What?

ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.

VLADIMIR: He said Saturday. (Pause.) I think.

ESTRAGON: You think.

VLADIMIR: I must have made a note of it.

He fumbles in his pockets, bursting with miscellaneous rubbish.

ESTRAGON: (very insidious). But what Saturday? And is it Saturday? Is it not rather Sunday? (Pause.) Or Monday? (Pause.) Or Friday?

(15)

Moreover, they are not even sure if they are at the right place to wait. They ask each other if the tree under which they are supposed to wait for Godot is the one on stage or not. The only thing left for them to do is to wait until Godot comes if he comes at all.

In the meantime, as Vladimir and Estragon get used to their present condition, they try to talk to reduce their boredom until what they expect arrives. However, talking does not help them to communicate because they are preoccupied with the object they are waiting for. On the other hand, the act of waiting enables them to be able to analyze their present and past situation. Eventually, this act of waiting becomes a quest of the

unknown be it Godot or death or their own existence. They are aware that they cannot change the present so they try to make themselves remember the old times when they were happy or try to sleep in order to go to another place, at least spiritually. To achieve that, Estragon chooses to sleep and dream, but Vladimir prevents him from sleeping.

ESTRAGON: (*restored to the horror of his situation.*) I was asleep!
(*Despairingly.*) Why will you never let me sleep?

VLADIMIR: I felt lonely.

ESTRAGON: I had a dream.

VLADIMIR: Don't tell me!

...

ESTRAGON: (*gesture towards the universe.*) This one is enough for you?
(*Silence.*) It's not nice of you, Didi. Who am I to tell my private nightmares to
if I can't tell them to you?

VLADIMIR: Let them remain private to you. You know I can't bear that.

ESTRAGON: (*coldly.*) There are times when I wonder if it wouldn't be better
for us to part. (16)

When awakened in a fright, Estragon finds it meaningless that they have to stay together all the time. He even thinks of parting from Vladimir. As for Estragon's situation, there is no factual answer but we know him enough to say that he cannot even find food or protect himself since Vladimir supplies these things for him. Contrary to what Estragon feels, Vladimir feels the need to be awake all the time they wait and does not want to be left alone in the void that surrounds them. Hence, Vladimir tries to wake Estragon up every time he falls asleep. They both need each other to guarantee their existence; yet, this is not always enough for them to keep themselves satisfied with their present conditions. They are together and alone in that they can only communicate to a small extent. In addition, obviously, after having a person too long as company, one gets bored and tired of the relationship as the loneliness in the void continues. In Act II of *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir confesses that he has had enough of Estragon's lamentations. Upon this Estragon says he is leaving, but Vladimir does not care and goes on searching for Lucky's hat. Eventually, after Vladimir finds the hat, Estragon forgets that he was leaving and stays with him. This shows how it is impossible for

them to have any kind of solid ground that would enable them to have a stable character that can make decisions and put them into practice. The last part of Act I makes it clear that they will not be able to carry out their decision to part as the state of ennui they are in prevents them from acting.

VLADIMIR: We can still part, if you think it would be better.

ESTRAGON: It's not worthwhile now.

Silence.

VLADIMIR: No, it's not worthwhile now.

Silence.

ESTRAGON: Well, shall we go?

VLADIMIR: Yes, let's go.

They do not move. (54)

On the side of the characters, the most painful thing about their waiting is the uneasiness of being stuck at the same place not knowing until when. Moreover, everything will have to be experienced again and again to confirm their existence. When there is no one to confirm their existence, theirs becomes an “existence without essence” (Gordon 61). Graver affirms Gordon’s conviction in *Waiting for Godot* in the following quote:

Esse est percipi (‘to be is to be perceived’) – Beckett often quotes the concept at the heart of Bishop Berkeley’s philosophical thought, which is also central to his own fiction and drama. According to Berkeley, the universe exists only by virtue of God’s continued perception of it. Vladimir’s mounting dread at this moment in the play comes from his suspicion that if the Boy was not here yesterday and does not tell Godot that he saw the two men on the country road, then their very existences are rendered precarious. (51)

Confirmation of their existence is so crucial for the characters that it is not enough for them to be perceived just by each other; they feel the need to be perceived by others as well. When the little boy comes to bring forth Godot’s message, Vladimir does not let

the little boy go before the boy promises that he will inform his master of what has happened.

BOY: What am I to tell Mr. Godot, sir?

VLADIMIR: Tell him ... (*he hesitates*) ... tell him you saw me and that ... (*he hesitates*) that you saw me. (*Pause. Vladimir approaches, the Boy recoils. Vladimir halts, the Boy halts. With sudden violence.*) You are sure you saw me, you won't come and tell me tomorrow that you never saw me! ... (92)

From the above passage, we understand that the Boy (this one or another) has come before and has been given the same message that Godot will come surely the following day. In addition, he has told them that he hasn't seen them before. This has happened so often that they start to lose their sanity. This pattern is repetitive, and each time it occurs they have to wait another day for Godot to come. As Graver observes, this scene

confounds the audience about the meaning and implications of the action. Secondly, it heightens the importance of the events of the play as theatre, as the knowing imitation of actions that supposedly have a reality elsewhere. And, finally, it accentuates the need for the spectators and readers to concentrate more intently on *how* Vladimir and Estragon respond to events – the way they perform their roles – rather than on the significance of the events overall. (*Waiting for Godot* 49)

Hence, Beckett does not convey any meaning by presenting these characters in certain situations; rather, his is an act performed for the sake of narrating and dramatizing his narration. In so doing, Beckett has broken the order of habit on the side of the audience/reader and puts everything that seems certain at stake again. At this point in the play, nothing is certain, including the characters' names that are given in the stage directions as Vladimir and Estragon, but in the play they don't use these names to call each other; Vladimir is Didi and Estragon is Gogo when they talk to each other. In the first act, they decide to hang themselves on the tree on the stage. While they are

rationalizing on who will hang himself first, Estragon childishly complains about Vladimir's insistence on his hanging himself first as he weighs less so the tree will not break:

ESTRAGON: (with effort). Gogo light – bough not break – Gogo dead. Didi heavy – bough break – Didi alone. Whereas –
VLADIMIR: I hadn't thought of that. (18)

Moreover, when they finally decide to hang themselves on the tree on the stage in Act II, they are still not sure what kind of tree it is.

ESTRAGON: (*looking at the tree*). What is it?
VLADIMIR: It's the tree.
ESTRAGON: Yes, but what kind?
VLADIMIR: I don't know. A willow.
Estragon draws Vladimir towards the tree. They stand motionless before it. Silence.
ESTRAGON: Why don't we hang ourselves? (93)

So, uncertainty has absorbed everything that has existed so far in the play. What is to be done is the only question to ask now that the characters are devoid of their sense of existence. At this stage the play centers on how Vladimir and Estragon continue to respond in the act of waiting to the frustration of expectation and the denial of certainty. As J.P. Little has observed, "Godot as an existent being is of dubious reality, but their wait is the very fabric of their lives" (quoted in Graver 50).

Another couple that is bound to each other is Pozzo and Lucky. Pozzo acts like the bourgeois master and he thinks that he can control his life just as he controls his wealth. Lucky is his slave and follows Pozzo obediently wherever he goes. It seems as if Pozzo and Lucky have a direction to go, unlike Estragon and Vladimir in that they move instead of staying in the same place. However, in the second act, we are shown that this movement has not been to their advantage because Pozzo comes on stage blind and

Lucky refuses his bones. Pozzo realizes that he is not very powerful and time could change him too. This also shows that no one can control their fate or give a specific direction to life. As Lois Gordon puts it,

... Pozzo eventually reaches Lucky's conclusion: human accomplishment is futile in the face of an indifferent, if not malign, ruling force, which he addresses as the same undefined "they" who beat Estragon. (77)

Lucky's famous speech is a good example of Beckett's critique of and attack on the language of philosophy, science and especially religion by parodying and mocking them.

LUCKY: Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquaqu with white beard quaquaquaqu outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment... (42-43)

Beckett shows that God's ways of dealing with his creatures is incomprehensible and illogical as "for reasons unknown" he loves some dearly and makes some suffer.

In Gordon's view, Pozzo and Lucky "are magnified versions of Vladimir and Estragon in their mutual needs, resentments, and loneliness," (79). Therefore, when Pozzo and Lucky's seemingly purposeful journey results in failure we get the impression that if Vladimir and Estragon move to another place, they will encounter the same consequences, too.

Furthermore, in his depiction of mutually bound but at the same time helpless characters in his plays Beckett underscores his claims he made in *Proust* about the nature of friendship:

Friendship, according to Proust, is the negation of that irremediable solitude to which every human being is condemned. Friendship implies an almost piteous acceptance of face values. Friendship is a social expedient, like upholstery or the disposition of garbage buckets. It has no spiritual significance. For the artist, who does not deal in surfaces, the rejection of friendship is not only reasonable, but a necessity. Because the only possible spiritual development is in the sense of depth. (63)

Not having anything else to do, Estragon and Vladimir take refuge in their illusions of reality to console themselves.

ESTRAGON: We don't manage too badly, eh Didi, between the two of us?

VLADIMIR: Yes yes. Come on, we'll try the left first.

ESTRAGON: We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?

VLADIMIR: (*impatiently*). Yes yes, we're magicians. But let us persevere in what we have resolved, before we forget. (69)

Graver's observation is relevant here:

As Vladimir grudgingly agrees, he and his friend are magicians, and – in the enclosed world of their invented routines – they are also surprising surrogates for Berkeley's God, guaranteeing the existence of the universe and its inhabitants by perceiving it. But they are also in a curious way precursors of late twentieth-century post modernist artists: mindful of absurdity, the burden of self-consciousness, and the insufficiency of their own means of expression. And they are post-modern, too, in their commitment to the belief that life itself is indistinguishable from theatre and that to say is to invent, to create enabling fictions. (59)

By the end of the play, the question of Godot's existence has been wiped out of the reader's/audience's and, to some extent, of the character's mind. The play no longer interrogates into who Godot is or whether he will ever come or not. On the contrary, Godot becomes just an idea or object in Beckett's disorderly universe of the text. In Graver's words, Godot is just

a concept – an idea of promise and expectation – of that for which people aware of the absence of coherent meaning in their lives wait in the hope that it will restore significance to their existence. (40)

Godot has been endowed with divinity in the play; he is immediately related to God and Christ. Godot, like God, does not have a physical presence but he has a dominating influence on the lives of the characters – Estragon and Vladimir fear him but at the same time they greatly need his presence. If they cease to wait for Godot, they are afraid that he might punish them and more significantly that they might lose their faint hope and chance for a change, any kind of change, in their present status with the coming of Godot. To quote Smith,

Godot's role is similar to that of the Christ of the Second Coming. The vaguely predicted Second Coming is one more projected answer to the eternal questions of men. Like Godot's arrival, Christ's appearance would stop the cycles of time and provide the definitive ending. Existence is a wait, by nature incomplete, a continuously unsatisfied curiosity to know if there is anything beyond itself. (893)

Hence, by establishing a parallel between Godot's coming and Christ's second coming, Beckett shows us that the problems posed by metaphysics cannot be solved by any ideology or dogma. More importantly, by using intertextuality, one of the most significant elements of postmodern theory, he shows that "both history and fiction are

discourses, that both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past” (Hutcheon 89). In other words, *Waiting for Godot* casts doubts on biblical history and the reliability of the Bible as the authoritative agent of Christian faith and belief via posing questions about the nature and meaning of human existence. The long silences in the play signify the impossibility of finding definite answers to the questions posed. As Luis Gordon puts it,

Godot’s every word and gesture resounds in a void of silence, and the purity of Beckett’s minimalist designs echoes everything unsaid, the infinite polyphony and silence of the universe. The ultimate absurd paradox is that an indefinite possibility of meanings accrues to a world without definition. (69)

Beckett believes that everything – life, even God’s justice – is arbitrary and accidental. He explains this clearly to Harold Hobson in an interview in 1956:

There is a wonderful sentence in Augustine. ... ‘Do not despair; one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned.’ (quoted in Olney 13)

This biblical parable is also referred to in *Waiting for Godot* and Vladimir questions its truth:

VLADIMIR: And yet . . . (*pause*) . . . how is it – this is not boring you I hope – how is it that of the four Evangelists only one speaks of a thief being saved. The four of them were there – or thereabouts – and only one speaks of a thief being saved. (*Pause.*)

. . .

ESTRAGON: Well what of it?

VLADIMIR: Then the two of them must have been damned.

ESTRAGON: And why not?

VLADIMIR: But one of the four says that one of the two was saved.

ESTRAGON: Well? They don't agree and that's all there is to it.

VLADIMIR: But all four were there. And only one speaks of a thief being saved. Why believe him rather than the others?

ESTRAGON: Who believes him?

VLADIMIR: Everybody. It's the only version they know.

ESTRAGON: People are bloody ignorant apes. (12-13)

The resolution they reach is that people who believe in the reports of the Evangelists “are bloody ignorant apes.” Beckett attempts to show that only chance determines human life. There are different versions told about the fate of those thieves by the Evangelists, which prove the role of chance in our existence. Apparently, what is left to do for us is nothing since everything, even our fate is determined by chance.

At the closing scene of the play, Vladimir and Estragon still talk about how Godot’s coming or not coming will affect their existence:

ESTRAGON: I can't go on like this.

VLADIMIR: That's what you think.

ESTRAGON: If we parted? That might be better for us.

VLADIMIR: We'll hang ourselves tomorrow. (*Pause.*) Unless Godot comes.

ESTRAGON: And if he comes?

VLADIMIR: We'll be saved. (94)

If Godot comes, they will be saved and if he does not, they will be damned which is reminiscent of the story of two thieves Vladimir told. However, at the end of the play no solution is suggested for their predicament and the play ends where it begins.

VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON: Yes, let's go.

They do not move. (94)

Consequently, the characters are caught in a dislocated space as permanent exiles who endlessly question their own authenticity and the absurdity of their existence – in vain.

ENDGAME

In another one of his seemingly traditionally structured plays, *Endgame* (1957), Beckett again focuses on a pair of characters, Hamm and Clov, who are faced with death and nothingness as they attempt to find meaning for their existence. The theme of waiting here is about waiting for the inevitable end, death, to come. As in *Godot*, in *Endgame*, too, Beckett calls into question the notion of a coherent and meaningful universe with stable and recognizable values.

After *Waiting for Godot*, which is set on a country road, Beckett has chosen to set his next play indoors. The room is bare and there is grey lighting. There are two small windows on the left and the right at the back and their curtains are drawn. Near the door on the front there is a picture hanging facing the wall. Two ashbins are covered with an old sheet touching each other on the front left. In the center of the room, Hamm is in a wheelchair covered with an old sheet too. Clov with a very red face stands near the door without moving and looking at Hamm. This is the first short scene we encounter at the beginning.

As in all of Beckett's plays, the stage has been minimalized to parody the traditional decorative theatre. The world outside the room is felt to be non-existent with curtains drawn on it. This is the world inhabited by the characters on the stage. However simple the setting and stage directions are, they are cogent enough to strike the reader/audience with a sense of claustrophobia. The tie between the familiar world we live in and the one before us has been cut off before any of the characters open their mouths to enable the audience to figure out where they are. As we find out eventually, we are at the end of the world where time has stopped.

According to Michael Worton, Beckett's "first plays mark the transition from Modernism with its preoccupation with self-reflection, to Postmodernism with its insistence on pastiche, parody and fragmentation," ("*Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*: theatre as text" 69). Obviously, in *Endgame* Beckett has used all those elements. His

play does not have a standard structure; on the contrary, it starts *in medias res* and does not follow a linear plot line, with a climax and dénouement. In other words, his play has a “cyclical structure” where there is no final closure.

The play starts as though the characters have always been on that stage even before the play started. Clov comes on stage, “goes and stands under window left. Stiff, staggering walk. He looks up at window left. He turns and looks at window right” (92)⁵. After that, he starts to repeat similar actions as if it is part of a routine of his everyday life and gives a brief laugh each time. He speaks his first lines tonelessly,

CLOV (*fixed gaze, tonelessly*): Finished, it's finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished. (*Pause.*) Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap. (*Pause.*) I can't be punished any more. (*Pause.*) I'll go now to my kitchen, ten feet by ten feet by ten feet, and wait for him to whistle me. (*Pause.*) Nice dimensions, nice proportions, I'll lean on the table, and look at the wall, and wait for him to whistle me. (93)

One interpretation of these lines is that Clov refers to his routine of going to the windows and looking outside and that is about to finish very soon. We may assume he will carry on repeating the same actions the whole play long. Next, he goes and removes the handkerchief from Hamm’s face and we are introduced to Hamm who comes to play his part and entertain his audience as he is ready to play the endgame that Clov has started.

The opening lines of Clov present the major theme of the play: that life is a circular existence without a specific beginning or ending. The first scene with Clov creates a sense of repetitive stasis. Clov's definition of the "impossible heap" expresses this idea in paradoxical terms. Since a heap is not composed of one grain, but “grain upon grain”

⁵ All references to *Endgame* are to the following edition: *The Complete Dramatic Works*. London: Faber and Faber, 1990.

there are individual heaps coming together and making a heap, it is, actually an "impossible" heap because it is composed of individual heaps. Similarly, human existence consisting of individual moments will never become a final "life." This explains why Clov starts by saying "Finished", and then changes his statement to "it must be nearly finished" as nothing is ever truly finished until death. In other words, we repeat our actions and those repetitive actions cycle around and become static. As there is "zero" change in the end, so we are at the beginning again.

Beckett's conception of existence as a cyclical phenomenon is based on existentialism. In *An Introduction to Existentialism*, Robert G. Olson explains Nietzsche's existential theory:

[...] it follows according to Nietzsche that every existing combination of elements will necessarily recur over and over again in the future. Each of our individual lives with all its frustrations, dangers, and heartbreak will be indefinitely repeated. This is our fate and it is a hard one. But, says Nietzsche, man must become a "holy yea-sayer"; he must learn how to love his fate. (62)

At the beginning of *Endgame*, the characters' fate seems to have been determined before it has started. They are stuck in a world where there is no one else left but themselves, and considering the outside conditions – "Outside of here is death" (96) – their life is about to end too. However, Beckett does not present us characters who have reconciled with this fate. Their moves, from repeating basic insignificant actions to making up stories suggest that they have not learnt "how to love their fate".

In view of the fact that Beckett views life as an "impossible heap", his characters do not have unified personalities. On the contrary, they are fragmented and they are aware of their own status as part of an "impossible heap". Moreover, they persistently struggle to postpone their inevitable end, which is death. Hamm asks Clov the time and not surprisingly, it turns out to be "the same as usual" (94). Time seems to have stopped for

these characters and they begin to live in the realm of timelessness. Eventually they get used to their present situation and they choose to keep going until their presence will stop somehow, somewhere, sometime. Getting used to their circumstances becomes another habit in the same way waiting for Godot becomes a habit for Vladimir and Estragon. In both *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* Beckett underscores his definition of habit, which he decides in *Proust* as “the great deadener” (19). While waiting, we come to a point when we cannot be aware of what we are waiting for because we get used to our situation so much that the line between illusion and reality breaks and everything looks the same. In Beckett’s own words habit is

the ballast that chains the dog to its vomit. Breathing is habit. Life is habit. Or rather life is a succession of habits, since the individual is a succession of individuals; the world being a projection of the individual’s consciousness, the pact must be continually renewed, the letter of safe-conduct brought up to date. (*Proust* 19)

For Beckett, our ability to capture the authentic core of existence is dulled by the frustration of habit. He goes on explaining that language, which is dulled by habit, becomes cliché, and it is the blockade that protects us from the painful agony of human existence (*Proust* 19-20). Beckett’s intention is to break that chain of habit in the shaping of his characters to make it possible for himself and his audience to set aside their preconceived notions of individuality and a coherent self so that they can confront the absurdity of their empty, meaningless existence.

Martin Esslin points out that in *Endgame*, the habit of being used to the classical structure of the theatre is “freed from all elements of a naturalistic social setting and external plot” (*The Theatre of the Absurd* 76). The main character, Hamm, is blind and confined to a wheelchair; the world outside is dead; and we feel as if his slave Clov leaves him, both will die immediately. Moreover, everything is confined to their present situation. However, even in such a depressive condition Hamm can tell stories to pass

the time which has come to a halt and to forget about his present situation. Thus, Beckett is more concerned about what the character he has devised does and how he tells a story than what he lives through. As Esslin points out, “Beckett is concerned with probing down to a depth in which individuality and definite events no longer appear, and only basic patterns emerge” (76). The pattern here is the endgame that the characters play. They are aware of their own fictionality which is one of the most important tenets of postmodernity. As Brian MacHale explains in *Postmodernist Fiction*,

For a character’s knowledge of his own fictionality often functions as a kind of master-trope for determinism – cultural, historical, psychological determinism, but especially the inevitability of death. (123)

Linda Ben-Zvi states in *Samuel Beckett* that Beckett’s writing “the two constant poles” emerge: “awareness of nihilism and the evasion of such awareness by the imposition of diversionary tactics – both verbal and physical – to lighten the knowledge,” (1). The characters know that their fate has been determined prior to their existence and there is nothing to do about it except to go on till their pre-determined end. To put it another way, characters are the puppets of the playwright and the director, which is a metaphor for their being puppets of fate, of history, and finally of the human condition.

Even though Hamm and Clov are aware of their pathetic condition, they can neither find any reason for it nor intend to do something to change it:

HAMM: You feel normal?
 CLOV: (*irritably*):I tell you I don't complain.
 HAMM: I feel a little strange. (*Pause.*) Clov!
 CLOV: Yes.
 HAMM: Have you not had enough?
 CLOV: Yes! (*Pause.*) Of what?
 HAMM: Of this... this... thing.

CLOV: I always had. (*Pause.*) Not you?

HAMM: (*gloomily*): Then there's no reason for it to change.

CLOV: It may end. (*Pause.*) All life long the same questions, the same answers. (94)

Throughout *Endgame* movement is contrasted with immobility and the tension between mobility and immobility constitutes the dramatic conflict in the play. the ability to move assigned to Clov is contrasted with the helpless immobility of Hamm and the two old people in the trash cans. However, although Clov is not confined to a wheelchair like Hamm and as he is not imprisoned in a trash can like Nagg and Nell, he has difficulty moving; he cannot sit down and moves in a strange manner with a “stiff and staggering walk” (92). The characters’ inability to move signifies their inability to change their empty insignificant existence devoid of any meaning or significance.

One of the important issues *Endgame* focuses on is whether Clov will leave Hamm or not. Clov seems more aware of his lower status as Hamm’s slave. However, their relationship is mutually bound; Hamm provides food and shelter for Clov, and in return Clov provides legs and eyesight for Hamm. Although Clov tells Hamm that he is going to leave him some day, it is obvious that Clov will not be able to do it because they need each other for survival. More importantly, Hamm says they are together for the “dialogue” as the exchange of words – i.e., language is their only means of existence. Michael Worton confirms this view in his article, “*Waiting for Godot and Endgame: theatre as text*”: “each partner needs to know that the other is there: the partners provide proof that they really exist by responding and replying to each other” (72). He affirms the eighteenth-century Irish philosopher Bishop Berkeley’s claim that to be is to be perceived (72). The implied reciprocity in Berkeley’s statement is found in *Endgame* as Beckett peoples his world with such mutually bound characters. In a universe where nothing has been left and no center is possible, one needs the other to be aware of his existence.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that Beckett's characters are aware of their own insignificance, weaknesses and limitations, and by so designing his characters, Beckett reverses the three-dimensional and consistent characters of classical drama. For example, Linda Ben Zvi points out that there are similarities between Hamm and Prospero in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*:

He is also a director like Prospero in *The Tempest*, and echoes his line "Our revels now are ended." The parallel to *The Tempest* is even more clearly drawn, since in it Miranda and Ferdinand sit playing a game of chess, imitating Prospero who attempted to make chess-men of the other characters. (*Samuel Beckett* 147)

This is made clear when Beckett quotes Prospero's sentence from *The Tempest*, "Our revels now are ended" (4.1.148). Moreover, it is not only the masters that are alike in both plays, but also Clov can be regarded as similar to Prospero's slave, Caliban in *The Tempest* as well. Just as Prospero became Caliban's master and taught him the language he used, Clov indicates that he has learnt everything he knows from his master, Hamm:

CALIBAN: You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you
For learning me your language! (*The Tempest* 1.2.366-68)

CLOV: ... I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything
anymore teach me others. Or let me be silent. (*Endgame* 113)

Both of the slaves accuse their masters of teaching them a deficient language. In both plays, the masters, Prospero and Hamm, show off their powers, especially their verbal powers by making the characters around them obey them. However, it is made clear in both plays that these masters are not as powerful as they claim to be. At the end of *The Tempest*, Prospero abandons his magic power to control others, and at the end of

Endgame Hamm is left alone, and at least believes that Clov has left him, so he has no one to control around him. Actually, from the beginning of *Endgame*, although Hamm is the seemingly control mechanism, he is confined to the wheelchair and cannot even manage to control his own body properly. If Clov leaves him one day, Hamm will definitely die.

According to Worton, Beckett's intertextual references in his plays "fragment the text and send the readers off on chases for meaning, for explanation, for enlightenment". Moreover, they indicate that "whenever we speak or write, we're using someone else's thoughts and language" (81). In this way, "we are condemned or 'damned' to construct ourselves through the discourses of others" (81). As the writer repeats what has been said before and transforms it, Beckett's reader/audience is invited to work out the meaning of the play as he reads/watches it. Hence, the reader is also assigned a role in the creation process, which is one of the marked features of postmodernist writing. In Worton's words,

This abdication of authorial power and this appeal to the creative intervention of readers mark Beckett out as one of the founding fathers of, and one of the major witnesses to, our Post-Modern condition. (85)

It is important to note that although in *Endgame* no one – like Godot in *Waiting for Godot* – is expected to come and change the present situation of the characters, there is still the seeming hope for change. With Hamm, Beckett reminds his reader/audience that, we "are on earth and there is no cure for that" (125). Moreover, there is the idea that "something is taking its course" (107). As Olson puts it,

The fundamental existential conviction that although life is inescapably tragic and man necessarily doomed to frustration, values sufficient to make life worth the effort are available to him within the very heart of despair. (*An Introduction to Existentialism* 62)

Under these circumstances, waiting brings with it the process of questioning that leads to a faint hope regarding the meaning and significance of life which at present is a dead end in itself. However, the “something” that is taking its course is never explained in the play, and thus our hope is deferred again. In this way, Beckett solidifies the theme of existence as being cyclical and excruciating and presents his characters’ situation as a representation of the essence of all human existence. With the two old characters, Nagg and Nell, in the ashbins Beckett takes this process of questioning even further.

NELL: What is it, my pet? (Pause.) Time for love?

NAGG: Were you asleep?

NELL: Oh, no!

NAGG: Kiss me!

NELL: We can’t.

NAGG: Try. (Their heads strain towards each other, fail to meet, fall apart again.)

NELL: *Why this farce, day after day?* (emphasis added 99)

The absurdity of man's condition is clearly displayed in the above quotation. Moreover, Nell’s famous sentence, "Nothing is funnier than unhappiness" (101) emphasizes this absurdity too. This absurdity stems from the fact that Hamm’s, the so-called master, parents are kept in rubbish bins and even when Nell, his mother, dies there is scarcely any talk about it. It shows that the ‘value’ of a parent or death, one of the most important aspects of human life, is not actually so different from all the tangible materials like painkillers and sugarplums and it is running out too. This is not only an undermining of the values of life, the family but it is also an undermining of ‘progress’ and change. Especially the death of Nell reveals the fact that nothing really ever changes even when someone dies. It just shows that once a person is dead it is as if he has never existed.

Through the effect of comedy Beckett tries to present man’s absurd situation at its worst condition. At first glance, Nagg and Nell’s confinement in ashbins is comic, out of the ordinary and thus absurd. In addition to Hamm’s confinement to a wheelchair is

very grotesque too. We realize that the reason these characters continue this “farce” is to satisfy their own need to affirm their existence.

Through creating such a stage which is deprived of familiar elements, Beckett “rejects any performance mode that invites the audience in – there can be no cozy sharing of a human essence,” (Michael Goldman, “Vitality and Deadness in Beckett’s Plays” 76).

Some critics have noted that the characters of *Endgame* resemble chess pieces playing an "endgame" in which the outcome has already been determined. Endgame is the term used to describe an ending in chess where the outcome is already known. Chess masters often study endgames in order to guarantee themselves victory once they maneuver their opponent into a certain position. In the play, death is the final outcome, and regardless of how a character plays the game, he or she will die. Michael Worton confirms this assertion by using Beckett’s own comments taken from Deirdre Bair’s well-known biography, *Samuel Beckett*:

Hamm is a king in this chess game from the start. From the start he knows he is making loud senseless moves. That he will make no progress at all with the gaff. Now at the last he makes a few senseless moves as only a bad player would. A good one would have given up long ago. (*could that be Nell?*) he is only trying to delay the inevitable end. Each of his gestures is one of the last useless moves which put off the end. He is a bad player. (71)

If Hamm was a good player of chess, he wouldn’t have continued his play; however, he goes on playing even though he knows that he has already lost the game:

HAMM: ... The end is in the beginning and yet you go on. (Pause.) Perhaps I could go on with my story, end it and begin another one.... All kinds of fantasies that I'm being watched! A rat! Steps! Breath held and then ... (he breathes out) then babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark.... and all life long you wait for that to mount up to a life.... Ah let's get it over!... (126)

Linda Ben Zvi's explanation here is relevant:

All that exist within the frame of the Beckett world, the confines of the skull, are words. Stories are the pasting together of lexical constructions – words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs – in the attempt to build a life. The same is true of the characters' search for a unified self. The self becomes an extension of the words that define it. Beckett's people know that they are in a hopeless predicament: for the stories can be finished only when the words stop, and the self can be known only in the silence that lies beyond language. (6)

Hamm's words, parallel to Clov's lines at the beginning about the "impossible heap" are similar to Clov's rationalization. Hamm also explains that it is an "impossible" life as it consists of separate moments, until death consumes it. Then, there comes the question of why go on playing this game if the end is pre-determined? It is possible to find many answers to this question in the play; it may be the characters' reluctance to finish the game because they do not want to face the final outcome – silence and death. Also, they yearn for an understanding that they can never achieve. All they can do is to carry on asking questions and thus keep the dialogue going for it is the only proof of their existence.

If we take the word "play" in both senses, playing a game and playing a part in a theatre play, Beckett's illustration becomes more obvious: "*Endgame* is a play about play, where the participants do not speak of winning but of merely finishing" (147). Ben-Zvi explains. As in chess, every move in Beckett's theatre is meant to cause another one.

Beckett is the mastermind behind his characters and he directs them to play certain parts in certain ways and in certain times. The world of stage is the world he creates, and the characters are his creatures who, like Hamm, are aware of their fictionality. Similar to Beckett himself, his characters know that when the curtains fall down, their parts will finish and thus their fictional lives will come to an end. Yet, as a bad player in chess who is aware of the inevitable end and yet goes on playing, Beckett continues to write although he knows he will fail with the aim of “failing better” with each new play:

Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.
(*Worstward Ho* 89)

Similarly, in his novella, *Company*, Beckett takes up the same subject of the impotent writer who cannot write no matter how hard he tries. A fragmented old person babbles words and makes up new characters in his mind in order not to feel alone like Hamm.

To one on his back in the dark a voice tells of a past. With occasional allusion to a present and more rarely to a future as for example, You will end as you now are. And in another dark or in the same another devising it all for company. Quick leave him. (8)

There is no clear definition of place. The story takes place simply in the dark. Ben Zvi asserts that, “Whether light or dark, small or spacious, all these enclosures are variations of the same skullscape,” (5) and everything is distorted as nothing, especially not time and thus self, is fixed in the skull, which causes the fragmentation of self. According to Ben Zvi’s analysis,

Because of this disjunction, all of Beckett’s people have the continual sense that they are being watched, if only by themselves, (5-6).

And thus the man lying in the dark feels,

Then on from nought anew. Huddled thus you find yourself imagining you are not alone while knowing that nothing has occurred to make this possible. The process continues none the less lapped as it were in its meaninglessness. (86)

However, both Beckett the writer and Beckett the character in the novella are aware of the fact that they are alone in the dark with the void surrounding them and the presence of the other they feel their fragmented split self which cannot attain unity or wholeness.

At the end of *Endgame*, Hamm thinks that Clov has left him and he is alone on the stage. Although at first he is a bit startled by the fact that he is left without an audience to watch him and a companion to listen to his stories, he overcomes his fear and goes on playing until he returns to he was before the play started:

HAMM: Clov! (*Long pause.*) No? Good. (*He takes out the handkerchief.*) Since that's the way we're playing it... (*he unfolds handkerchief*) ...let's play it that way... (*he unfolds*) ...and speak no more about it... (*he finishes unfolding*) ...speak no more. (*He holds handkerchief spread out before him.*) Old stancher! (*Pause.*) You... remain. (*Pause. He covers his face with handkerchief, lowers his arms to armrests, remains motionless.*) (*Brief tableau.*) (109)

To quote Ben Zvi again:

With its form thus exposed, the play becomes itself object, and Beckett can include it with those items that remain unfinished. ... by so doing, he offers the possibility of the game continuing and the play form circling back upon itself to work out yet another move in an ongoing, unfinished game. (150)

Since the beginning of the play, Beckett has not let us suspend our disbelief. On the contrary, with Hamm's asides – e.g., his lines such as “Me to play” which he utters with a yawn – Beckett has kept us constantly aware of the fact that we are watching a play produced by a writer whose work is doomed to start over and over again as it is never completed.

KRAPP'S LAST TAPE

In *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Not I*, Beckett focuses mostly on the postmodern concept of memory. As Linda Hutcheon expresses in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, postmodernism “suggests no search for transcendent timeless meaning, but rather a re-evaluation of and a dialogue with the past in the light of the present” (19). While doing that, Hutcheon claims that postmodernism “does not deny the *existence* of the past; it does question whether we can ever *know* that past other than through its textualized remains” (20). In his plays, Beckett attempts to show us that in the act of remembering, the individual tries to create a bond between a past self but fails to do so and this leads to the fragmentation of the self. To quote Hutcheon again,

Postmodern works challenge narrative singularity and unity in the name of multiplicity and disparity. Through narrative, they do tend to fragment or at least to render unstable the traditional unified identity or subjectivity of character. (90)

James Olney also comments on the function of memory in the creation process in *Memory and Narrative*: “it is memory of what has been done that requires the artist to go on to what must be done” (393). Thinking and remembering can trigger individual characters to feel the need to tell a story and to go on telling it endlessly, however much that story may be fragmented.

In *Krapp's Last Tape*, the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp's listening to the younger Krapp's voice in the tape recorder is another confirmation of the self's isolation and fragmentedness. Krapp has recorded his voice every year on his birthday for thirty years and after thirty years he tries to listen to himself again. Presumably something in a sixty-nine-year-old man's life must have changed in thirty years. However, nothing has changed in Krapp's life; he is still eating bananas, playing the tape, and living in the same world and as the curtain falls, “The tape runs on in silence” (12). In the end,

neither Krapp nor his tape is heard. Only the fragmented stories that Krapp has recalled from his past remain.

As James Olney puts it, while presenting characters who are “tormented figures retracing the paths of their lives,” Beckett “gives us a picture of his own life retracing, through the body of his work” (*Memory and Narrative* 375). However, Beckett looks back on himself not as Beckett the man but Beckett the writer of his own life work. In his painful and persistent struggle to discover his self, Beckett always underscores the theme of alienation from the fragmented past selves which do not exist in the present. Martin Esslin confirms Beckett’s view of the self in *The Theatre of the Absurd*: “being subject to this process of time flowing through us and changing us in doing so, we are, at no single moment in our lives, identical with ourselves” (51). Thus, we can never be sure of who we were in the past as the past has undergone a change while changing us at the same time. In Beckett’s own words,

There is no escape from yesterday because yesterday has deformed us, been deformed by us. Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday. (*Proust* 13)

In *Krapp’s Last Tape*, Beckett lets his protagonist, Krapp, attempt to find a way of determining the effects of Time on his life by recording his experiences year by year. We realize that in this way Krapp tries to remember his old self as much as possible and not let his life slide through the years. However, it is obvious that it is not possible to preserve every memory and thus a self that has been lived and done away with successfully. There occurs a gap that is always inherent in the individual’s self. According to Carla Locatelli, in “Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Not I* as Autobiographies”, that gap is called “the subjective gap”, which

is conceptualized in Krapp, and it is arguably the play's most powerful theme. At the performative level, the impossible coincidence of *self* and *I* is evident in the contrapuntal discrepancy between speaking and listening to oneself speak. Additionally, the intermittent and random nature of recording one's experience shows the arbitrary and fragmented nature of self-portraiture based on memory, especially when played ironically against willed intention. (73)

Thus, Beckett sees self as a multiple entity and is convinced that to collect all the different selves is an arduous business for the individual to attain.

Before Krapp starts listening to the tape, his movements and words seem like childish gibberish. We have no idea what he is doing or who he is talking about in his first soliloquy:

KRAPP: (*briskly*). Ah! (*He bends over ledger, turns the pages, finds the entry he wants, reads.*) Box . . . three . . . spool . . . five. (*he raises his head and stares front. With relish.*) Spool! (*pause.*) Spooooo! (*happy smile. Pause. He bends over table, starts peering and poking at the boxes.*) Box . . . three . . . three . . . four . . . two . . . (*with surprise*) nine! good God! . . . seven . . . ah! the little rascal! (4)

He keeps on searching for boxes and tapes, and reads the entries to the tapes, such as "Mother at rest at last", "the dark nurse", "the memorable equinox", "farewell to love" (5). When Krapp starts listening to the tape, we learn that the voice coming from the tape recorder belongs to Krapp "at a much earlier time" (5) and we realize that the entries he read are his memories he had recorded in the past. This explains why the Tape is given the role of a character in the play and it is as if there are two different characters on the stage playing different parts. Like Vladimir and Estragon who are a pair that cannot leave each other even though they say they will in *Waiting for Godot*, or like Hamm and Clov, who are a pair desperately tied to each other to keep the dialogue going in *Endgame*, in *Krapp's Last Tape*, too, Krapp and his tape are parts of the same individual's past and present selves to keep that individual's interior

monologue going. The obvious difference in *Krapp* is that there is no possibility for communication at all and Krapp at sixty-nine wishes to master thirty-nine-year-old Krapp's stories. However, it is impossible to do so on the grounds that Krapp at sixty-nine cannot go back and change the things Krapp at thirty-nine said or did. He listens, comments on the stories told by his former self, gets angry from time to time, curses his old self, rewinds or rewords the tape, and goes on listening. In his essay, "Beckett's Romanticism", Enoch Brater's examination of Krapp's character is relevant here:

In this play Krapp, the so-called hero, is its self-inflicted victim; he is also an ambiguous figure who sits apart from the action, thinking about it. Isolated and alone, and with the requisite hint of dementia vying with moments of heartrending lucidity, he is sometimes grandly stoical, at other moments far less so. Forcing himself to remember, to remember – to memorialize and reimagine a past that can be brought back only in words – he is simultaneously wistful and forgetful. And in this troubled and willful blurrings of time present and time past, his participation in the drama, oddly enough, is anything but tentative. (147)

This remembering and reimagining process is explained after thirty-nine-year-old Krapp tells about how he "celebrated the awful occasion", which we understand as his birthday, by "sitting by the fire with closed eyes, separating the grain from the husks" (5). This reminds us of Clov's first words in *Endgame*:

CLOV (*fixed gaze, tonelessly*): ...Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap. (93)

Like Clov, Krapp too thinks that life is a succession of individual moments and years; he counts the years past in need of realizing each of them separately. As Beckett says of Proust,

‘Man,’ writes Proust, ‘is not a building that can receive additions to its superficialities, but a tree whose stem and leafage are an expression of inward sap.’ We are alone. We cannot know and we cannot be known. ‘Man is the creature that cannot come forth from himself, who knows others only in himself, and who, if he asserts the contrary, lies.’ (66)

Similarly, in *Krapp* Beckett shows us the human isolation that springs from the individual’s attempt to become one with the self and thus to create an individual life. The only thing that is gained from these traces of memories is that Krapp has company of his former self in his isolation.

Ironically, even though sixty-nine-year-old Krapp cannot identify himself with thirty-nine-year-old Krapp, who was also addicted to eating bananas and drinking, we see that there is an obvious parallel between them. Just as sixty-nine-year-old Krapp calls thirty-nine-year-old Krapp “that stupid bastard” (10), thirty-nine-year-old Krapp calls the younger Krapp he listened to a “whelp”. Moreover, another similarity is that they are both addicted to alcohol. The following quote reflects this parallel clearly:

TAPE: Hard to believe I was ever that young whelp. The voice! Jesus! And the aspirations! (*Brief laugh in which Krapp joins.*) And the resolutions! (*Brief laugh in which Krapp joins.*) To drink less, in particular. (*Brief laugh of Krapp alone.*) (6)

Additionally, we also realize here that there is not just one pair of Krapps, because thirty-nine-year-old Krapp also listens to himself at an earlier time, thus producing multiple Krapps. Apparently, this is an ongoing process as the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp is made up of other Krapps in the past. “I” in the above quotation is the “I” of thirty-nine-year-old Krapp. “That young whelp” is the one who the “I” cannot identify himself with. There is also the sixty-nine-year-old Krapp listening to all those Krapp’s with a laugh. As Locatelli asserts, “Whereas self-narration is usually expected to

determine the construction of identity, Beckett in *Krapp* questions this warrant” (74). All through the play we are led to review the life of a human being and ask questions such as, “Are you the same or a different person?” “Does the ‘grain upon grain’ become a real ‘heap’?” “Can you ‘separate the grain from the husk’?” These are questions that Krapp asks himself throughout the play. As Robert Reginio explains in “Samuel Beckett, the Archive, and the Problem of History”,

It is nevertheless through a confrontation with his labyrinthine archive – the interleaved temporalities we hear emanating from his tapes – that Krapp seeks a way beyond the architecture of inscriptions that tacitly promises mastery over the past, but which disintegrates his (and the audience’s) sense of his identity. (112)

As the play proceeds, we learn that Krapp has been doing this recording for a long time. Thirty-nine-year-old Krapp lets us know that he was listening to “passages at random”, different from sixty-nine-year-old Krapp, and this leads him to remember a memory of a girl called Bianca in Kedar Street, the relationship with whom he defines as “a hopeless business” (6). Near the end of that passage thirty-nine-year-old Krapp is about to comment on that incident, which makes sixty-nine-year-old Krapp a bit uneasy and he does not want to go on listening to that passage. He goes back stage into the darkness to get a drink and starts singing hesitatingly. It reminds us of “the one lying back in the dark” in Beckett’s novella, *Company*: Krapp goes backstage and becomes “the one in the dark” who is questioning himself:

Though now even less than ever given to wonder he cannot but sometimes wonder if it is indeed to and of him the voice is speaking. May not there be another with him in the dark to and of whom the voice is speaking? Is he not overhearing a communication not intended for him? If he is alone on his back in the dark why does the voice not say so? ... Perhaps for no other reason than to kindle in his mind this faint uncertainty and embarrassment. (9-10)

In “Matters of Memory in *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Not I*” Jeanette Malkin explains this situation of recalling of a former self as an “objectification of memory” and asserts that

It is a way to theatricalize dual consciousness; it is also a way to give a one-man play “company”. Krapp presents us not only with the act of remembering a life: it is also a dialogue between living and remembrance, present and past – Man and his Memory. (27)

Both in *Krapp* and in *Company*, the old men are in search of their inner selves but at the same time in need of finding a gateway to escape from that self, which is an impasse. Beckett clarifies this in his novella: “The voice alone is company but not enough. Its effect on the hearer is a necessary complement” (11). Therefore, both selves of an individual are always necessarily present with that individual at all times.

Apart from the fragmentedness of the self, Beckett’s concern is with the idea of memory. According to Beckett, as he explains in *Proust*, there are two types of memory, voluntary and involuntary. Beckett praises Proust for favoring involuntary memory over voluntary memory, which “presents the past in monochrome”:

The images it chooses are as arbitrary as those chosen by imagination, and are equally remote from reality. Its action has been compared by Proust to that of turning leaves of an album of photographs. The material that it furnishes contains nothing of the past, merely a blurred and uniform projection once removed of our anxiety and opportunism – that is to say, nothing. (33)

It is exactly what Krapp does: recording his memories and choosing among them the ones he wants to listen to. His memories become like the “photographs” in an album, always in the same time, frozen there. Nothing has changed but nothing has stayed the

same in either fragment of the person in that moment. Even though the archival attempt is to keep everything in store to remember it in the future, it is not possible:

TAPE: – Back on the year that is gone, with what I hope is perhaps a glint of the old eye to come, there is of course the house on the canal where mother lay a-dying, in the late autumn, after her long viduity (*Krapp gives a start*), and the-- (*Krapp switches off, winds back tape a little, bends his ear closer to the machine, switches on*) – a-dying, after her long viduity, and the – *Krapp switches off, raises his head, stares blankly before him. His lips move in the syllables of "viduity." No sound. He gets up, goes back stage into darkness, comes back with an enormous dictionary, lays it on table, sits down and looks up the word. (7)*

As shown here, Krapp has chosen to listen and remember the memory of his mother's death, but he cannot even come to terms with the reason why he used the word, "viduity", let alone remember its meaning.

Consequently, we realize that it is not possible to recover the past voluntarily by archiving memories of the past carefully on tapes and in boxes. As Irit Degani-Raz explains in "The Spear of Telephus in *Krapp's Last Tape*",

Memories are always contaminated by the present rememberer, and words and images lose their meanings in time and change with different situations. What can be represented is a stage body reacting to and being re-figured by the mechanical reproduction of his voice memory. (212)

According to Jonathan Boulter, in "Archives of the End: Embodied History in Samuel Beckett's Plays",

In *Proust*, Beckett argues that the past threatens continually to "deform" the subject and alerts us, as he will do in his drama, to his awareness of how lethal, yet unavoidable a continual and thus melancholic, relation to history can be:

history is something that has passed but is “irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous.” (130)

Similarly, Krapp constantly deals with the process of self-definition but he will be exhausted by this “homework” (10) as he calls it as he painfully realizes that he has taken himself for someone like himself again.

KRAPP: Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank God that's all done with anyway. *(Pause.)* The eyes she had! *(Broods, realizes he is recording silence, switches off, broods. Finally.)* Everything there, everything, all the – *(Realizing this is not being recorded, switches on.)* Everything there, everything on this old muckball, all the light and dark and famine and feasting of . . . *(hesitates)* . . . the ages! *(In a shout.)* Yes! *(Pause.)* Let that go! Jesus! Take his mind off his homework! (10)

This section marks the realization on sixty-nine-year-old Krapp’s part that everything that has happened in his life and everything he has said so far does not make much sense now. No matter how hard he tries to choose to remember and narrate his life story, he is doomed to failure in the end for there is “nothing to say, not a squeak.” And he asks the inevitable question, “What’s a year now?” and answers himself, “The sour cud and the iron stool” (10). He then reviews his life once again as if to start everything over again. This obsessive archival act has not helped Krapp reconcile his former self with his new self. At the end of the play, it is clearly established that Krapp will go on keeping records of his years even though it is heart rending and tears him apart.

The most climactic moments of the recorded memories are old Krapp’s failure to achieve artistic ambition. As Locatelli explains,

In fact, the obsessive archive which is produced by the drive to capture the self, and which somehow certifies one’s own existence, indicates the failure to which writing itself is destined. (75)

Indeed, Krapp's act of telling of a life story is actually related to Beckett, the writer's struggle to find something to write about in his work. As Olney asserts, this self-narrating process reflects Beckett's "telling the story of himself telling the story of himself telling the story of his life," and the failure on the part of his characters is actually his own failure to create a narrative that is artistically ordered and shaped.

NOT I

Not I is one of Samuel Beckett's latest plays, written in 1972. The play comprises all his central themes such as the problem of identity, the impossibility of attaining a complete self, ontological dualism, the objectification of memory and the uncontrollable power of the involuntary memory. However, in *Not I* he takes these issues to the extreme and creates a more striking and cogent dramatic work both from the point of view of his reader/audience and his actors.

To convey this striking effect, Beckett eliminates the classical dramatic means such as characters, stage directions and a logical and orderly story presented on stage. The protagonist does not even possess a consistent bodily shape let alone consistent personality traits. She is totally depersonalized and fragmented – just a MOUTH without an “I” of a steady self. she tells her own life story in the third person which clearly indicates her alienation from her self.

The only movement that is allowed in the play is given to AUDITOR who is the silent listener of the Mouth, with an indeterminable sex, in loose black djellaba, standing downstage, “shown by attitude alone to be facing diagonally across stage intent on MOUTH, dead still throughout but for four brief movements where indicated”; other than that, the Auditor, too, is “dead still” (85).

Before the lights come up, Mouth's unintelligible voice is heard behind the curtain. Mouth starts the play before the house has been lighted and tells a story about a premature birth and a loveless childhood:

MOUTH: out . . . into this world . . . this world . . . tiny little thing . . . before its time . . . in a godfor— . . . what? . . . girl? . . . yes . . . tiny little girl . . . into this . . . out into this . . . before her time . . . godforsaken hole called . . . called . . . no matter . . . parents unknown . . . unheard of . . . he having vanished . . . thin air . . . no sooner buttoned up his breeches . . . she similarly . . . eight months later . . . almost to the tick . . . so no love . . . spared that . . . no love such as normally vented on the . . . speechless infant . . . in the home . . . no . . . nor indeed for that matter any of any kind . . . no love of any kind. (85)

As the play proceeds, we learn that Mouth was not conceived as a child of love, she hasn't known her father as he "vanished" right after she was conceived and her mother didn't show any compassion to her as an infant. She tells her story, "ad-libbing from text" (85) spontaneously and ceaselessly. It sounds as if she has kept all of her memories in her mind/imagination till now and once she starts talking about them, there is no way she can stop herself. The words follow each other, as if to catch up with the narrator's imagination, but there is no logical continuity in their order. Even though the story is incoherent, Mouth goes on telling it, moving backwards and forward in her life-story. For example, while talking about her birth, she begins to relate her memories at the age of sixty, and then corrects herself and mentions "coming up to seventy", and then remembers

MOUTH: wandering in a field . . . looking aimlessly for cowslips . . . to make a ball . . . a few steps then stop . . . stare into space . . . then on . . . a few more . . . stop and stare again . . . so on . . . drifting around . . . when suddenly . . . gradually . . . all went out . . . all that early April morning light . . . and she found herself in the — . . . what? . . . who? . . . no! . . . she! . . . [*Pause and movement I.*] . (85-86)

Her own way of narrating/remembering is baffling even to herself. Still, she vehemently refuses "to relinquish third person" (83), which muddles everything in the play. As seen above, while she is telling the story, she stops and asks questions,

“what?” and “who?” as if she is talking to somebody in her mind or to herself and provides her own answers to the questions – e.g., “no!” and “she!”

In “Archives of the End: Embodied History in Samuel Beckett’s Plays”, Jonathan Boulter analyzes Beckett’s views on Proust’s use of history in his work and claims that

In *Proust*, Beckett argues that the past threatens continually to ‘deform’ the subject and alerts us, as he will do in his drama, to his awareness of how lethal, yet unavoidable, a continual and thus melancholic, relation to history can be: history is something that has passed but is ‘irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous.’ (130)

This concretization of history and melancholia adds up to the striking effect of Beckett’s drama. The mouth insists on the use of “she” in her narrative since her refusal to use it would mean admitting the first person pronoun “I” so that all the things she narrates would be hers and hers alone. She is not ready to let herself drown in the melancholia of that history.

James Olney claims,

For Beckett, ..., the primary agent in the making of the mess – and perhaps in its unmaking too – is nothing other than human memory, which like narrative in Beckett, is obsessive, self-creative, self-destructive, a faculty that for better or worse is much more than a faculty, too often out of our (or any) control. (*Memory and Narrative* 16)

Yet, although “memory is narrative and obsessive,” it is “unsuccessful in evoking the first person singular” (Olney 18). So there is no narrative “I” to do “the expressing”, still there is the “obligation to express” (*Duthuit* 103), which is a force beyond the artist himself. Therefore, “it becomes a narrative without substance, form without content,

and narrative form becomes the content. It shows us a conscious or a subject in quest of itself,” (Olney, 24). However, in *Not I*, as indicated in the title of the play, the subject (the Mouth) forces herself not to use the first person pronoun and to tell her story in third person as if implying that it is impossible to reach an “I” of a unified subject.

In “Matters of Memory” Jeanette R. Malkin analyzes *Krapp’s Last Tape* and *Not I* and shows how Beckett uses different forms of memory. According to her analysis, Beckett uses “formalizing devices” to “give theatrical shape to the process and posture of remembrance; and to the subsequent problems of reception” (1). Malkin then explains that

The memories revealed or the words which suddenly ‘come’ are not ‘of the essence.’ Rather, it is the complex new of memorized states of being – the interplay of inner voices, the pluralisms of self-perception, the complexity of agency, of volition or its lack, the simultaneity of pasts and presents, the multiple modes of repetition and recall, of traces and patterns: which evoke a sense of our own trivial yet inevitable multiplicity, simultaneity, fragmentedness. (31)

“The complex new memorized state of being” in *Not I* is the Mouth. Boulter asserts that the image of the mouth “concretizes the idea of embodied or archived memory, of subjectivity and thus history inextricably linked, cathected to, shards of the material” (130). Hence, the stage becomes a “trope for memory” and the body on the stage becomes the memory that “speaks for and speaks of itself at the level of absolute disavowal” (130). So, what Mouth rejects is to be the subject who tells his story and she also refuses to be a part of language. As Derval Tubridy asserts in “Vain Reasonings: *Not I*”, “by refusing to say ‘I’, Mouth both denies her position as a speaking subject within that language and denies the possibility of language” (117).

In *Intend of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Works*, Gontarski claims that

fundamental patterns are evident in Beckett's creative process. At least some sense of a field of aesthetics emerges. The most discernible pattern is the intentional undoing of a text's origins" (3).

By "undoing" the "text's origins" Beckett defamiliarizes and alienates himself with his characters, plot, setting, language, and all conventional norms in order to create a diminutive work to which no certain meaning can be attached. To achieve this, he tries "to break down traditional mimetic notion of art, to move his art to higher and higher levels of abstraction, and to shape his fragments harmoniously" (Gontarski 15). Thus, he does not follow a traditional linear structure in his works, because life itself is not linear but cyclical. His characters cannot reconcile with the others or even with themselves. In *Not I* Beckett confirms his views expressed in *Proust*:

The artistic tendency is not expansive, but a contraction. And art is the apotheosis of solitude. There is no communication because there are no vehicles of communication. ... either we speak and act for ourselves – in which case speech and action are distorted and emptied of their meaning by an intelligence that is not ours, or else we speak and act for others – in which case we speak and act a lie. 'One lies all one's life long,' writes Proust, 'notably to those that love one, and above all to that stranger whose contempt would cause one most pain – oneself.' (63-64)

Thus, in *Not I*, different from all his previous works, Beckett reduces his protagonist to a mouth who is estranged from her self so much that she cannot use the pronoun "I" and thus resorts to telling her story in the third person.

In *Company*, too, Beckett presents a character who consists of different selves and calls them "addition to company":

Deviser of the voice and of its hearer and of himself. Deviser of himself for company. Leave it at that. He speaks of himself as of another. He says speaking of himself, He speaks of himself as of another. Himself he devises too for company. Leave it at that. Confusion too is company up to a point too. (34)

It is very similar to what the Mouth is doing, devising other selves to keep the company of her third person and telling them the story of another, presumably the story of an “I”. In both *Company* and *Not I* the protagonists feel that there is another person in the dark telling them unintelligible things, “A voice comes to one in the dark” (7) says the old man lying on his back in *Company*. Similarly, the Mouth asks and answers questions to someone not present on the stage and therefore “absent” from the text.

In *Company*, there is also another similar passage to the Mouth’s story:

In the same dark as his creature or in another not yet imagined. Nor in what position. Whether standing or sitting or lying or in some other position in the dark. These are among the matters to be imagined. Matters of which as yet no inkling. (35)

It is as if the Mouth now imagines what hasn’t been imagined in *Company*:

MOUTH: she did not know . . . what position she was in . . . imagine! . . . what position she was in! . . . whether standing . . . or sitting . . . but the brain – . . . what? . . . kneeling? . . . yes . . . whether standing . . . or sitting . . . or kneeling . . . but the brain – . . . what? . . . lying? . . . yes . . . whether standing . . . or sitting . . . or kneeling . . . or lying . . . (86)

The similarities between the passages, even the order of the words “standing, sitting, lying”, are startling. However, this is not all. Both of the works blend thought and memory, both of the protagonists refer to the touching memories of their childhood, even to their births, and there are multiple voices in both of the texts. More importantly,

in both of the works Beckett lets his characters create themselves only to be erased and recreated again.

Toward the end of the play, the Mouth (or the writer) feels exhausted with all this creating and undoing process and realizes that “it can’t go on” as it gets more and more difficult for her to “make something of her thoughts” (89). However, there is nothing else she can do since this is an unavoidable process, and just like her speech the creation process cannot be stopped. Finally, she gets to the point of “begging it all to stop” (92) but she cannot get an answer:

MOUTH: keep on . . . trying . . . not knowing what . . . what she was trying . . . what to try . . . whole body like gone . . . just the mouth . . . like maddened . . . so on . . . keep – . . . what? . . . the buzzing? . . . yes . . . all the time the buzzing . . . dull roar like falls . . . in the skull . . . and the beam . . . poking around . . . painless . . . so far . . . ha! . . . so far . . . all that . . . keep on . . . not knowing what . . . what she was – . . . what? . . . who? . . . no! . . . she! . . . SHE! . . . [Pause.] . . . what she was trying . . . what to try . . . no matter . . . keep on . . . [*Curtain starts down.*] . . . hit on it in the end . . . then back . . . God is love . . . tender mercies . . . new every morning . . . back in the field . . . April morning . . . face in the grass . . . nothing but the larks . . . pick it up – (92-93)

There is nothing else left for her to do but to follow the urge to relate the fragments of a fragmented self’s past ceaselessly. Hence, the play has an open ending suggesting that it will never end. To quote Malkin,

In *Not I* we really cannot locate a source, a moment, a place at which an I, a self, resides. Beckett’s careful shaping of the fragments of memory in *Not I* is in many ways paradigmatic for postmodern memory theatre. (37)

STIRRINGS STILL

Throughout his artistic life, Samuel Beckett's oeuvre was based on self-reduction, self-negation, undoing, fragmentation, and minimalism. With *Stirrings Still*, it becomes only "the shape that mattered for Beckett" and "the shape of a life as remembered, the shape of a life as narrated" (Olney 422). It is as if in *Stirrings Still*⁶ Beckett is telling us about his ceaseless struggle to create all his life's work. And what he has achieved seems to be "such and much more such the hubbub in his mind so-called till nothing left from deep within" (265), presenting the impossibility of both escaping and going beyond the self.

To achieve his aim in his dramatic works, Beckett found the solution of violating the traditional theatre in favor of his minimalistic style. In *Waiting for Godot*, which is seemingly the most structured play analyzed so far, nothing is certain, the characters are on a country road, there is an unnamed tree, and it is evening and no certain date given. The play starts *in medias res* and nothing seems to happen throughout the play. Even the characters are uncertain of their own whereabouts. In the end, everything finishes where it starts and nothing has been resolved. *Endgame* is also presented as having no proper beginning, middle or end and no certainty of resolution is possible of this play either. With *Krapp's Last Tape*, the characters are reduced to one; there is only one man, Krapp, on stage and we hear his voice on a tape recorder. Communication was very limited in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* as the characters talk only to prevent themselves from being aware of the unavoidable void surrounding them, but in *Krapp* there is no communication at all. Gradually, Beckett demolishes the necessary elements of the drama, which are time, place, character, and more importantly language. With *Not I* the characters become unidentifiable; there is not a body on stage but just a mouth as the protagonist and an auditor with an indefinite sex. The story the mouth tells has no coherence but continues ceaselessly, as if the speaker is unable to stop himself from talking.

⁶ All references to *Stirrings Still* are to the following edition: Samuel Beckett: The Complete Short Prose, 1928-1989, New York: Grove Press, 1996.

In his prose work, Beckett achieves this reduction process by eliminating every possible description of a tangible self and its story.

In *Company*, a man hears a voice he does not know, and the reader cannot be sure if there are one or more men telling the story of the person telling the story. There are glimpses of a past life but it is not definite and the one telling the story sounds as though he is narrating it differently each time. With *Stirrings Still*, this reduction process gets more obvious and there is only one man who observes himself move out of his own being.

Stirrings Still, Beckett's last piece of work, written between 1986-1989, is the culmination of his life's work and is his last attempt to express the inexpressible. It comprises all the essential features of Beckett's writing such as self-reduction, fragmentation of the self, self-referentiality, reiteration and verbal echoes of his previous works, the impossibility of endings as well as the nonlinearity of narrative and memory, which are the cardinal principles of postmodernism. *Stirrings Still* also contains numerous references to his previous works, which enables him to recall what he has done so far and to review his career as a writer. In James Olney's words, *Stirrings Still* is

a vast exercise in recalling all that Beckett has been and done as a writer, distilled into a very few words, all of them simple in the way that only Beckett could achieve simplicity. (355 – 6)

As there are many references and allusions to Beckett's previous works in *Stirrings Still*, only the most significant ones will be analyzed here. The following allusion is to *Krapp's Last Tape*:

One night as he sat at his table head on hands he saw himself rise and go. One night or day. For when his own light went out he was not left in the dark. Light of a kind came from the one high window. Under it still the stool on which till he could or would no more he used to mount to see the sky. (259)

This man sitting at his table can easily be identified with Krapp who sits alone at a table in his den and listens to himself on the tape recorder. And that light in the man's room is seen in Krapp's room too, but only through the tape recorder:

TAPE: ... The new light above my table is a great improvement. With all this darkness around me I feel less alone. (*Pause.*) In a way. (*Pause.*) I love to get up and move about in it, then back here to . . . (*hesitates*) . . . me. (*pause.*) Krapp. *Pause.* (5)

The stool under the high window reminds us of Clov's laborious attempts to mount up and look out the window to see the world outside in *Endgame*. Just as the man's light leaves him in the dark, Clov feels that his light is dying too (98). All of these characters realize that they are witnessing their end's approaching with their light diminishing. To overcome this tension, they are all in search of finding other selves (friends in *Godot*, master and slave in *Endgame*, tape recorder in *Krapp*, the different persona in *Not I*, the voice in *Company*), with whom to share their experiences. To paraphrase Estragon's words in *Godot*, they all attempt to give themselves the impression that they exist (69). In *Stirrings Still*, this search is presented with the man sitting at the table watching himself rise and go.

In *Stirrings Still* the man who sits at the table says at the beginning that "he saw himself rise and go" (259). However, in the second paragraph, he reverses this claim and gradually this movement is annihilated as he stands "clinging to the table" and "sits again" before he rises and goes again "on unseen feet [...] so slow that only change of place to show he went" (259). Obviously, what is difficult for this man is to execute the

act of going or moving. What he does instead is merely waiting – “to see if he would or would not” move (260), which is reminiscent of Estragon and Vladimir’ waiting for Godot and their hesitation regarding whether they should leave each other or not.

Stirrings Still is not only a rewriting of what Beckett has written so far but it also rewrites itself, too. For example, the second paragraph of *Stirrings Still* is a re-writing of the first one:

One night or day then as he sat at his table head on hands he saw himself rise and go. First rise and stand clinging to the table. Then sit again. Then rise again and stand clinging to the table again. Then go. Start to go. On unseen feet start to go. So slow that only change of place to show he went. As when he disappeared only to reappear later at another place again. (259)

The protagonist attempts to move only to end up where he has started which is reminiscent of *Waiting for Godot*. In that play, Estragon and Vladimir vainly attempt to leave each other and go, but at both acts’ end the stage directions inform us “they do not move”. Similarly, in *Endgame*, Clov constantly repeats that he is going to leave Hamm one day but at the end of the play, even though he has prepared to go, he does not leave. With *Stirrings Still* Beckett takes this theme of cyclical endings to the extreme and spreads it all through the body of his text.

In *Stirrings Still*, Beckett also focuses on the process of going back in memory and retrieving the moments of the past as he had done in *Krapp’s Last Tape* and questions the validity of this process:

For how could even such a one as he having once found himself in such a place not shudder to find himself in it again which he had not done nor having shuddered seek help in vain in the thought so-called that having somehow got out of it then he could somehow get out of it again which he had not done either. (264)

Both Krapp and the character in *Stirrings Still* are in search of a lost self, and they look for it in the fragmented states of being which they recollect from the past. Hence, they feel that their selves are split and incomplete, for it is not possible to unite with a former self. Thus, both the characters' and Beckett the writer's failure to go beyond the present self are clearly revealed. Consequently, *Stirrings Still* leaves us with the image of Beckett perpetually going on to depict his exasperated observations regarding the chaos of the self and the impossibility of constructing it in writing.

In this context, *Stirrings Still*, which "is the totting up of tottings up" in Olney's view (394), can be viewed as Beckett's final effort to reveal the impossibility of reaching a wholeness within the self.

To sum up, Beckett's works can be regarded as attempts to reveal literature's inability to reflect the self, which is unrepresentable. As the unity of the self cannot be attained, the writer cannot express anything – hence the impotent writer who always fails but continues to create ceaselessly as long as he lives.

CONCLUSION

Beckett's works analyzed in this study reflect a journey toward disintegration through an aesthetics of diminishment that brings him to the threshold of silence and total cessation. In *Not I* the flesh and blood characters of his earlier plays *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame* are reduced to a mouth – a nameless voice in an enclosed space that enacts its ignorance and impotence to speak of the self. And in *Krapp's Last Tape*, the tape recorder becomes one of the characters, reducing the body to a repository vehicle that signifies the complete collapse of the subject.

Also, through the technique of diminishment, the movements of the characters are reduced to inaction. With the immobilization of the body, the actors are reduced to words alone. As its title suggests, in *Stirrings Still*, Beckett's latest prose work, all movement comes to a halt and there are only "stirrings" left. Lack of movement on the part of the characters parallel the inability of language to express or reflect anything, as it consists of empty meaningless words that can do nothing better than while away the time and carrying its user to the threshold of death. As postmodern stylistic attributes such as disconnected syntax, fragmented sentences, and non-sequitur become the dominant norms of style, traces of memories and series of isolated images evoked serve only the function of providing company for the speaking voice who still regards words as his only means of survival and finds solace in them. To put it another way, language is emptied of all its semantic content is as frozen as the immobile characters on the stage; all it can do is to annihilate the writer's hope of locating his self in his fictional characters. Hence, the writer himself is also reduced to a disembodied voice mumbling to itself in the void, signifying both the impoverishment of the body and language.

Beckett's rejection of all the conventional narrative and dramatic devices such as a coherent plot, flesh and blood characters, and more importantly language as a means of expression, brings him to the brink of total silence. As for the readers, they are left with many questions to ponder regarding the meaning and significance of human existence

and the nature of the self. Beckett remains a towering figure of postmodernism by virtue of his canonical works.

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BIOGRAPHY

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